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The American University in Cairo

A Thesis Submitted

To

The Department of English and Comparative Literature

May 2003

The Castaway:

*A Comparative Study of Alienation in Franz Kafka's The Trial
and J.M. Coetzee's Foe.*

By

Alia Mohamed Taher Ahmed Tawfik Abou Zeid

The American University in Cairo

A Thesis Submitted
To
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Spring 2003

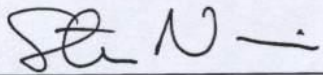
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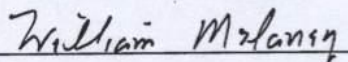
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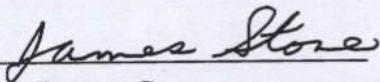
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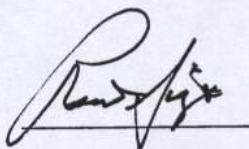
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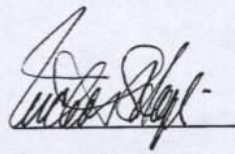
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For My Dear Parents:

My thesis is the most precious thing I can offer and dedicate to you. I am grateful for everything you gave and taught me. If it hadn't been for you, I wouldn't have managed to get the Master's degree and make a dream come true. Thank you for always being loving, kind, generous and supportive and may God bless you.

Your Daughter,
Alia Mohamed Taher

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Abstract

This thesis is a comparative study of alienation. It provides an analysis of the different ways in which the Czech writer, Franz Kafka, and the South African writer, J.M. Coetzee delineate alienation in their works, *The Trial* and *Foe*. Three aspects of alienation are discussed: alienation from self, world and language. Hence, the thesis emphasizes that man's predicament of alienation, homelessness and exile stems from a failure to recognize a self to which he can relate, an inability to find a home in an alien universe and an incapacity to develop a constructive relationship with words and language. This study not only focuses on man's existential predicament of alienation, but it also reveals that alienation is an experience that writer and reader go through in their encounter with a work of art. Thus, this study also explores the nature of a work of art and is concerned with the effects of literature on the reader.

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Sometimes I wake up not knowing where I am. The world is full of islands, said Cruso once. His words ring truer every day.

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 71

Introduction

“I feel that I exist only outside of any belonging. That non-belonging is my very substance. Maybe I have nothing else to say but that painful contradiction: like everyone else, I aspire to a place, a dwelling-place, while being at the same time unable to accept what offers itself” (Patterson, x). With these words, Edmond Jabès sums up in *From the Desert to the Book* the predicament of “the twentieth-century figure of the alienated individual” (Seigneuret, 39) and “the homelessness of the modern human condition” (Patterson, ix).

Jabès’ words highlight the centrality of the theme of alienation in modern literature since it presents man’s situation and plight in the world. Alienation takes different forms in literature and several writers have attempted to delineate and express the different forms it takes and the causes that produce this terrible and dreary state which is at the core of man’s existence and being.

The experience and state of alienation is a dilemma that man encounters as he enters the world and struggles to deal with and overcome it throughout his life. Man’s experience of alienation starts from his first day on earth as he is born and this is evident in the fact that his first introduction to life and earth is met with a cry. As the infant leaves its mother’s womb, it feels as if it has been deserted and expelled from its home, just as Adam and Eve were expelled from heaven and were doomed to a life of endless wandering and loss in the wide and difficult world.

Man’s life on earth is, therefore, a form of expulsion and an attempt to retrieve the lost paradise and home in which he would find his belonging and place in the world. In his attempt to find his dwelling-place, man attempts to arrive at an understanding of the self, the world he is living in and the language he speaks. However, as he seeks to achieve and develop a harmonious relationship with self, world and language, he is overwhelmed by their complexity and indecipherable nature. He realizes that these three categories that form the basis of one’s existence are doors he cannot enter or penetrate. As a result, he feels alienated from self, world, language and meaning.

The Czech writer Franz Kafka and the South African writer J.M. Coetzee express in their literature man’s state of alienation from self, world and language. In Kafka’s novel *The Trial* and Coetzee’s *Foe*, the self emerges as a riddle that one cannot solve, the world is seen as a strange, unfamiliar and uncanny place into which

one cannot fit or belong and language emerges as extremely complex and labyrinthine. Meaning and interpretation are always either absent or ambiguous and, instead, emptiness and hollowness are prevalent.

In *The Trial* and *Foe*, one encounters characters and situations that highlight man's estrangement and isolation from self and world. Joseph K. (the central character of Kafka's *The Trial*) and Susan Barton (the female narrator and central character of Coetzee's *Foe*) are infinitely embroiled in a battle against the silence and ambiguity of the self and the world. Their inability to decipher the self / world hieroglyphics is the major dilemma which results in their acute sense of alienation, aloneness and desolation in the world. Through these two characters' endless attempts to comprehend and unravel the self / world mystery, Kafka and Coetzee reveal that man's problem of assimilation or belonging stems from his inability to penetrate the dark alleys of the divided and dichotomized self and the meaningless, quizzical and unfathomable universe which he inhabits.

This study attempts to explore the different ways in which Kafka and Coetzee present and portray the experience of man's alienation and utter isolation through a comparative study of their works. In addition, in the analysis of Kafka's presentation of this theme, allusions are made to other major works (selected short-stories) by Kafka in which this theme is clearly evident.

Through the study of *The Trial* and *Foe*, an attempt is made at showing that both Kafka and Coetzee reveal that alienation is not merely man's plight in the world, but also that it is the reader's plight before a work of art. This shows how their works are a commentary on the reader's response to a work of art since they reflect the effect of literature and the literary experience on the reader. Like Joseph K. and Susan Barton, who are forever lost in the labyrinth of an incomprehensible and puzzling universe, the reader finds himself trapped and entangled in complex and labyrinthine texts that resist interpretation.

Like Joseph K. and Susan Barton, the reader struggles to unravel the mysteries and enigmas of the text in an attempt to find meaning in this inscrutable world. The reader's inability to find a trace of meaning through which he could be reconciled with the work of art makes him emerge from his experience with this literature of alienation as an embodiment of alienation himself. For like Kafka's and Coetzee's marginalized protagonists, the reader feels cast out by the text. He ends his journey with Kafka and Coetzee with no certainty or answers. Instead, like Joseph K. and

Susan Barton, he finds himself constantly asking never-ending and unanswerable questions, the most important of which is: “where do I belong?” or “where does man belong?”

An individual chapter is devoted to each aspect of alienation. The first chapter, entitled, “The Self as a Stranger,” presents an analysis of Kafka’s and Coetzee’s depiction of man’s alienation from the self. The major issues discussed in this chapter are: the self as a riddle and an enigma, the self and its existence as being questionable, the problem of “precarious and threatened individual identity” (Seigneuret, 14). The role of external forces in instilling the feeling of alienation and estrangement from the self will also be discussed, since an establishment and a definition of identity is dependent on these factors, rather than, simply on the individual’s perception of the self.

The second chapter, entitled, “The World as a Strange Place,” presents Kafka’s and Coetzee’s depiction of man’s alienation, isolation and homelessness in a world that has become totally unfamiliar and uncanny. The following major points will be taken up: the causes behind man’s estrangement from the world, the problem of an incomprehensible world, the notion of difference and otherness that heightens the sense of alienation and desolation, the continual search for a destination and a place in which at-homeness is felt, the problem of the world’s silence which creates the feeling of being an outsider, the continual search for an oracle that would answer one’s questions and explain the puzzle of life, and the position of the writer as an outsider. With respect to the final points, the fact that Kafka is a Czech writing in German and Coetzee is a South African writing in English is considered.

The third and final chapter, entitled, “The Nut without a Kernel,” examines the problem of the hollowness of words and language, the “sense of the betrayal of language” (Seigneuret, 41) and the palimpsestic text presented by Kafka and Coetzee as an attempt to reveal the reader’s experience of alienation before a work of art. Within this context, the problem of the absence of a source or foundation on which one could depend for interpretation, “the absolute absence of coherence and meaning at the root of existence” (Seigneuret, 41), the problem of understanding the message and meaning conveyed by the text, and the problem of the literal-minded reader who fails to grasp the message of a work of art are discussed. These concerns are related to the web-like and labyrinthine quality of text and language, the text as an investigation that raises questions but offers no answers, the protean text which contains multiple

layers of meaning and the impossibility of clinging to a single interpretation. Finally, the elliptic text which conceals rather than reveals, the text and its double and the text in conflict with the world are critically examined.

Thus, the purpose of my study, “The Castaway: A Comparative Study of Alienation in Franz Kafka’s *The Trial* and J.M. Coetzee’s *Foe*,” is to explore and examine man’s existential predicament of alienation, homelessness and exile which stems from a failure to conceptualize or recognize a self to which one could relate. The thesis centers around the plight of “the wanderer who can find neither peace nor a place to which he feels an attachment” (Seigneuret,38), his inability to find a home in a universe which is void of meaning and inability to establish relationship with words and language. The hollowness at the core of the self, world and language is what makes man’s life a difficult task in which he becomes doomed to a terrible existence based on perpetual and endless wandering. No Ithaka is ever arrived at and homelessness and alienation become man’s fate and share in life. This is the experience that Kafka and Coetzee express in their fiction.

Chapter One

The Self as a Stranger

All my life grows to be story and there is nothing of my own left to me. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? And you: who are you?

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 133

The Sphinx's riddle in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is what inspired me to explore the idea of man's estrangement from self. The Sphinx's famous riddle asked what being goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three in the evening. The answer to the riddle is 'man.' The fact that many people were doomed to death because of their failure to solve the riddle reveals the fatal effect of man's ignorance of self, and the large number of people who fail to solve the riddle reveals the immensity of man's self-estrangement since man fails to realize that the Sphinx is addressing the matter of human existence.

The Sphinx's riddle is a kind of mirror in which man should see and recognize himself but, instead of revealing himself to him, it makes him see an unrecognizable stranger. He contemplates the riddle as if it were asking about the strangest and most alien existent creature, not knowing that he is simply its subject. The Sphinx's riddle serves not only as a revelation of man's smallness before the universe, suggesting that he is the most helpless being in it, forever groping in darkness and blindness, but it also conveys a very significant message, which is that man is himself a puzzle.

Oedipus' ability to solve the Sphinx's riddle comes as a sign of hope and a manifestation of the triumph of human intelligence. However, as the play develops, all hopes are shattered as Oedipus fails to identify himself and realize throughout the long investigation he carries out that he is his own enemy and the subject of his search and inquiry. *Oedipus Rex* reveals that Sophocles was prophetic since he foresaw the rise of psychology, which not only came as a promise to calm and soothe man's

ailments, but also came as a thunderbolt that shattered the solid ground of man's belief that he understands and knows himself. Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis, had a very important message to pass on to humanity, which concerns the complex and quizzical nature of the human self.

Franz Kafka is a writer who manages to depict man's plight of self-alienation through his presentation of the self as a riddle. In *The Trial*, Kafka presents a protagonist who wakes up one morning to find his room invaded by two strange men informing him that he is under arrest. However, nothing is told about the nature of his offense. Joseph K. ventures from this point onwards on an endless journey to discover why he is accused. His attempt to investigate into the nature of his offense is symbolic of his self-investigation. Thus, as in *Oedipus Rex*, the self becomes the object of a quest and a riddle that the individual strives to solve.

Joseph K. spends his entire life asking and waiting for the court and its officials to reveal to him the nature of his crime. This reveals the extent to which he is an alien to himself, since he needs to be told what his offense is by others, but he himself knows nothing about himself. This need to solve one's own mystery by seeking external aid parallels a patient's need to depend on a psychiatrist to help him unravel the complexity of his psychic ailment. Thus, Kafka reveals that man's own self is the most bewildering puzzle he could ever encounter, and through Joseph K.'s dependence on the court and its officials to explain the puzzle of his offense, he confirms Freud's conclusion of the labyrinthine nature of the self and of "man's own mystery unto himself" (Draper, 1944).

In his attempt to emphasize the enigmatic quality of the self, Kafka presents a kind of tabula rasa character. For nothing is known about Joseph K., his background, personality and thoughts. The only information given about him is that he is a bank clerk. The absence of information through which Joseph K. could be individualized gives the character an anonymous aspect. K., therefore, emerges as a "nondescript man, devoid of spectacular deficiencies and virtues" (Politzer, 166) like Robert Musil's character in *The Man Without Qualities*. This could make the existence of a self questionable and doubtful. It is as if Kafka is trying to say through the blank nature of Joseph K. that individual identity is merely a myth.

In addition, the fact that Kafka mentions Joseph K.'s job as a bank clerk and makes this the only piece of information available on him reveals that the self vanishes but the function remains. The enigmatic and anonymous nature of the self is

further emphasized by the protagonist's name. For one never knows what the initial K. stands for. It stands as a puzzle and a reminder of the puzzle of the self, the absence of man's identity and his existence as an unknown entity.

The absence of identity and its questionable existence is also evident in the fact that when the warders Franz and Willem invade K's room, he searches for his identity papers but does not find them. The loss of K's identity papers symbolizes the eradication of the self. Joseph K's attempt to discover his crime is, therefore, an attempt to create an identity. Kafka reveals that the presence of a self and an identity is extremely doubtful in this world. He also reveals that identity has to be created and constructed, but that man is born with no identity and even if he has one, it can be either obliterated or forgotten. His work is, therefore, an "investigation of this forgotten being" (Kundera, 5).

The element of oblivion and blindness are also factors that bring about man's loss of identity and his self-alienation. This is clear in the fact that when K. tries to reconstruct the event of the announcement of his accusation by the warders to his neighbor Fräulein Bürstner, he tells her who was present in her room and what took place, but then he tells her: "Oh, I've forgotten myself, the most important character" (Kafka, 21). Here K. represents the state of "looking on oneself as something alien" (Thorlby, 15) as Kafka describes it in his notes.

However, K. is not only alienated from self but also from the very fact of his existence, since his presence is the last thing that he remembers, and the focus of his attention is merely on the events that took place in his midst. His detachment and relation to the event as if it has nothing to do with him is the most glaring manifestation of his self-alienation and "forgetting of being" (Kundera, 17). K's self-alienation also reveals itself when he listens and comments on the parable preached to him by the prison chaplain in the cathedral as if it is merely idle talk addressed to him, not realizing that "it is preached to him for a good reason: it is his story" (Thorlby, 68).

K's detachment and self-estrangement are also brought about by his extreme involvement in the proceedings and the situation that allows him to forget himself. K's external gaze is one of his major flaws. The supervisor tries to draw his attention to this flaw when he tells him: "I can advise you to think less about us and about what may happen to you, and more about yourself" (Kafka, 9). Thus, he draws his attention to his over-absorption into trivial matters, such as who the people who come to

announce his arrest are and whether they are authorized to condemn him, but he does not think about himself or what he might have done wrong. His lack of introspection is what drives him away from some sense of self and makes him observe the whole event with the cold withdrawal of a stranger.

There is also an element of volition in K's estrangement and withdrawal from self. For he claims that "if this was just a bit of make-believe, he would go along with it" (Kafka, 4). Thus, he intentionally chooses to lose and amputate his sense of self in this cycle of absurdity and, as a result, the self is annihilated. However, Kafka reveals in other cases that not only volition and free-will lead to self-alienation and annihilation of the self, but also, on the other extreme, tyranny and forceful domination bring about this state.

In *The Trial*, Kafka shows that the tyranny of the court and the advocates on whom the defendants depend leads to the total annihilation of the self. This is evident in Merchant Block's case. For Block, a client of advocate Huld to whom K. resorts to help him with his case, almost permanently stays at Huld's place, since his only concern is to ensure that Huld would effectively defend him. Block's residence in a place other than his own is symbolic of man's plight of non-belonging. Block emerges as a kind of homeless tramp, and the absence of a home is symbolic of the absence of a stable self.

Block's tenacious clinging to Huld parallels K's tenacious clinging to the court and its officials, since they both assume that salvation and the establishment of a self could be achieved only through proximity to them. Block's whole life is wasted on this endless process of waiting, and no other option is open to him. He is also reduced to a mere puppet by the advocate. Hence, when the advocate orders Block to crawl on all fours, he immediately obeys and "acts out the animal-identity in himself" (Goodman, 5).

The absence of a will or a sense of self-respect, revealed in the state of being reduced to bestial form, is a manifestation of man's estrangement from the human condition, which is distinguished by having self, a will of one's own, and an active mind. Block, however, does not have the ability to think for himself. He needs the advocate and even hires five more back-street advocates to think for him. Thus, he is merely a body with no self or mind. The advocate, who in turn represents the authority of the court, has the ability to eradicate and erase the self of the client and reduce him to a mere marionette. As a result, "the client forgot in the end about the

outside world and merely hoped to drag himself along this illusory path to the end of the case. The client was no longer a client, he was the advocate's dog. If the advocate had ordered him to creep into his kennel under the bed and bark from there, he would have done it willingly" (Kafka, 151).

Advocate Huld and the court which Kafka use as a symbol of an oppressive society, therefore, serve to obliterate the self. The invasion of the self by an oppressive regime is symbolized by the warders' invasion of K's room and privacy. The "violation of solitude" and "the rape of privacy" (Kundera, 111) are among Kafka's obsessions. They emerge as direct causes behind man's estrangement and separation from self since they deprive him of contemplation and self-reflection. In addition, the fact that the warders take all K's belongings including his clothes and underwear and deprive him of anything personal symbolizes the bombardment, dichotomization and extinction of the self.

As oppression emerges as an existential possibility, Kafka reveals that functionalism is another factor that severs and estranges man from self. The warders who come to arrest K. are the most obvious example of the alienating effect that functionalism exerts on man's self. The warders, like K., are ignorant of the nature of his offense and are also ignorant of the identity of the man they come to arrest. However, unlike K., they have absolute confidence and faith in the authorities they serve. They follow the orders without questioning them because they believe that "there's no room for mistake" (Kafka, 5). As a result, they become functionaries in the world rather than separate individuals. The two warders are, therefore, interchangeable and it becomes extremely hard to distinguish one from another. As a consequence, the self is totally annihilated and man becomes a total stranger to his inner being. The only knowledge or certainty he possesses is that he has a duty or a function to perform in life, but he is completely in the dark as to who or what he is.

Kafka also stresses his belief in the reduction of human beings and individuals to functionaries in the fact that he mentions Joseph K's profession as a bank clerk and offers it as the only piece of information available. Through K., he reveals that this is the condition of man in an oppressive society and also prophesies the condition of man in the modern world. He also anticipates the living-dead existence of humanity and "the Waste Land as the landscape of modern man" (Politzer, 19).

"The Metamorphosis" is another of Kafka's major works that reveals man's self-alienation through functionalism. Gregor Samsa, the protagonist, is a traveling

salesman who wakes up one morning to find himself metamorphosed into a giant beetle. “The traveling salesman wakes up one morning and cannot recognize himself. Seeing himself as a gigantic specimen of vermin, he finds himself in a fundamental sense estranged from himself. No manner more drastic could illustrate the alienation of a consciousness from its own being than Gregor Samsa’s startled and startling awakening” (Thiher, 148).

Furthermore, Samsa is only concerned with carrying out his job and catching the train to get to his office on time rather than contemplating his condition and the catastrophic transformation that has befallen him. “In his head he has nothing but the obedience and discipline to which his profession has accustomed him: he’s an employee, a functionary, as are all Kafka’s characters” (Kundera, 112). Samsa, like the warders in *The Trial*, is an example of a functionary who thinks only of his profession and function in society rather than the nature of his being and existence as a human. Like K. and the warders, he is an example of the “depersonalization of the individual” (Kundera, 107). Kafka, therefore, reveals the effects of being an inhabitant in a society that engulfs the self and reduces the importance of man only to his function and job in the world.

In addition, Samsa’s self-estrangement does not in fact start from the moment of his metamorphosis, but existed before his transformation as he was fully absorbed in his work with the sole concern of paying off his father’s debts. As a result, his family has been leading a parasitic existence by sucking his blood to the marrow in consuming the fruit of his labor. Thus, “not only is his labor alien to his true desires, but its sole purpose, its fruit – the salary or commission that it affords him – does not even belong to him. Gregor’s toil does not serve his own existence” (Thiher, 150).

“Through his sacrifice, Gregor had distorted his own self” (Corngold, 126). His metamorphosis, therefore, “literally enacts the ‘loss of self.’ It makes drastically visible the self-estrangement that existed even before his metamorphosis” (Thiher, 150). As a result, Gregor’s “own inner being remains alien to him. It is for this reason that Kafka gave it a form that is quite alien to him, the form of a verminous creature that threatens his rational existence in an incomprehensible manner” (Corngold, 122). “The horrible insect into which Samsa sees himself suddenly transformed, therefore, bursts in upon him just as the alien self, in the form of a monstrous gruesome court of justice bursts in upon Joseph K.” (Corngold, 123).

Furthermore, Gregor's "profoundly alienated existence prior to his metamorphosis establishes the parallel to man's fate after the expulsion from paradise" (Thiher, 152), which makes him doomed to a state of eternal loss and exile from his origin. He becomes an epitome of "the namelessness and facelessness of dehumanized humanity" (Politzer, 96). Samsa's beetle-body also confirms the notion of the self as the inexplicable, since we come to see that "it is beyond our conception of the self" insofar as "the beetle embodies a world beyond our conscious as well as our unconscious imagination" (Corngold, 131).

Samsa's plight is also the writer's plight, who is drawn away and estranged from himself through absorption into literature. Literature serves as the song of the Sirens that lures the writer away and fascinates him the way K. is fascinated and drawn into the world of the court with his whole being. In fact, Kafka spoke of the "transformation of self into literature" (Kafka, x) which was his condition. Actually, Kafka claimed that he was nothing but literature, and in a letter to Felice Bauer, he declared his inability to marry since "I am literature" (Heller, 2). This sense of "being an outsider, of having no existence except a literary one" (Heller, 2) reveals how "the creation harbors the creator and swallows him up to such an extent that he himself is denied any identification" (Politzer, 322).

The writer's fascination with literature and his view of it as a god or a religion, as Kafka viewed it, therefore, serves to estrange him from the self and creates an isolated and alienated person. Kafka willingly chose to relinquish this self and lead the "selfless life of writing" (Heller, 24) by choosing to spend his entire life dancing the Maenadic dance held in honor of his god, Literature. Therefore, in Kafka's world, it becomes obvious that "man has now become a mere thing to the forces that bypass him, surpass him, possess him. To those forces, man's concrete being, his world of life, has neither value nor interest: it is eclipsed, forgotten from the start" (Kundera, 4).

Gregor Samsa, in his beetle condition, also reveals another form of alienation, which is the existential state of alienation from the state of being human. For Samsa rejects and even feels disgusted by clean and fresh human nutrition. Instead, he develops a strong appetite for filthy and disgusting food given to animals and "from the dishes set down in front of him, he picks out for himself the ones that are spoiled, rotten and unfit for human consumption" (Corngold, 151).

His rejection of human food symbolizes his rejection of his humanity and the nausea it instills in him symbolizes his estrangement from his human self. He becomes a manifestation of “the individual’s estrangement from his humanity or ‘human species being,’ i.e., from the individual’s membership in the human species. The individual is estranged from himself insofar as he is alienated from his essential nature as a human being” (Thiher, 148). As a result, he plunges into the unfamiliar, uncanny self of beetledom. In one of his letters to Felice Bauer, Kafka gave perfect expression to this state when he said: “life is merely terrible...and in my inmost self perhaps all the time – I doubt whether I am a human being” (Kafka, xii).

The feeling of alienation and estrangement which Kafka expresses in *The Trial* is instilled through external forces that estrange man from the self. This is evident in the fact that K. is continually pursuing the court and the authorities to find out what his crime is, since he is ignorant of his offense. Thus, he has to depend on external forces (the world of the court) to arrive at a definition of his own self. Kafka, therefore, reveals how the establishment of identity can be dependent on external forces rather than on the individual’s perception of himself. It is also very ironic that K. is chosen by the bank manager to guide the Italian businessman around the town. For he can lead and guide people to different places but he himself needs to be guided by others into the labyrinth of the self. This confirms the fact that “one cannot know oneself in the same way that one knows things and people outside oneself” (Thorlby, 18).

J.M. Coetzee also poses the problem of man’s self-alienation in his novel *Foe*. He presents the problem of the enigmatic quality of the self and the fact that it is a riddle in several ways. One of his means of expressing this problem is through Cruso, the man who inhabits an island with his manservant Friday. Susan Barton, the female narrator, who is cast out on Cruso’s island, tries to find out who Cruso is and how he was stranded on this island. When she asks Cruso these questions, he tells her a different story about himself everyday. This reveals his self-alienation, since he cannot give himself a definite identity or relate a single story about himself. The puzzled Susan, who cannot put her finger on who Cruso is, highlights the fact that the self is a puzzle and an enigma that no one can solve. It exists as an endless series of conjectures and deductions without any univocal definition.

Another means by which Coetzee portrays the self as a puzzle is through the picture he draws of Friday. In fact, Friday emerges as a symbol of the enigma of the self and its indeterminate identity. The endless questions Susan asks about Friday in her attempt to understand him are a further manifestation of the self as an enigma and an unsolvable puzzle. Furthermore, the fact that Friday's tongue is cut out and that "the only tongue that can tell Friday's secret is the tongue he has lost" (Coetzee, 167) is another confirmation of the fact that the self is a riddle. It remains a question mark and a blank page just as Friday's story remains the empty page in the novel. The fact that only Friday's tongue can tell his story reveals that every human being is an enigma and a closed circle that no one can open and comprehend. Thus, no one can tell another person's story, and, if he does, the story he produces is different from the original one. Therefore, story-telling, as Coetzee presents it, becomes a means of wiping out and distancing man from his true self, rather than preserving and materializing it. The story-teller is, therefore, like Foe to Susan Barton, an enemy to the self.

In her attempt to arrive at an understanding of the self, Susan resorts to the writer Daniel Foe and questions him as to whether she and other people are substantial beings or mere shadows. Foe answers her saying: "My sweet Susan, as to who among us is a ghost and who not I have nothing to say: it is a question we can only stare at in silence, like a bird before a snake, hoping it will not swallow us" (Coetzee, 134). Foe's words reveal that man is a mystery unto himself. Susan's persistent query also highlights the fact that "the more powerful the lens of the microscope observing the self, the more the self and its uniqueness elude us" (Kundera, 25). Thus, the more we contemplate it, the more "the weight of a self, of a self's interior life becomes lighter and lighter" (Kundera, 27). Man's self is, therefore, something he will forever remain ignorant of and the biggest question mark he cannot answer. It is a curiosity he stands before in amazement, just as he stands amazed before any uncanny phenomenon.

In addition to his depiction of the self as a riddle, Coetzee reveals through his three major characters, Susan, Cruso and Friday, the problem of identity. The problem of identity is the major problem Susan Barton struggles with in relation to herself and to Cruso and Friday. For Susan is a woman whose daughter was abducted and, as a result, she undertakes a journey in search of her lost daughter which results in her being stranded on Cruso's island. The abduction of Susan's daughter symbolizes the

abduction of the self, and her journey to search for and restore her daughter symbolizes her attempt at regaining and retrieving her identity. Thus, Susan's abducted self, which her abducted daughter stands for, makes her live as a stranger and an alien unto herself. Therefore, she searches for it in an attempt at being reconciled with herself and perceiving her canny and familiar identity.

When Susan returns to England, a girl appears and claims that she is Susan's lost daughter. Foe also tells her that this is her daughter. However, Susan insists that this girl is not her own daughter, and that "she stands for the daughter I lost in Bahia" (Coetzee, 132). Thus, she is not her true lost self that has returned to her, but is merely a fake copy of it and a reminder and confirmation of the lost self that has not and will not return. Here Coetzee reveals in Susan's inability to relate to the girl, as Kafka reveals Joseph K's inability to identify his offense, that the lost self is irretrievable. This is what makes man doomed to a perpetual existence of self-estrangement and alienation just as Adam feels ill-at-ease and incomplete without Eve.

Cruso, like Susan, embodies the loss of self and identity. When Susan asks him to tell her his story, she says: "But the stories he told me were so various, and so hard to reconcile one with another...So in the end I did not know what was truth, what was lies, and what was mere rambling" (Coetzee, 12). Thus, Cruso is a perfect example of a man who has no individuality or unique identity. He has lost his former self and lives an anonymous existence on his island. His inability to reconstruct a true story about himself, which marks his loss of identity and emphasizes "the uncertain nature of the self and its identity" (Kundera, 28), makes the island the most appropriate place for him to live in, since his solitary existence in it, save for the company of the mute Friday, makes it unnecessary for him to possess a recognizable self.

Through Cruso's anonymous existence, Coetzee highlights the threat of self-annihilation that man faces. Like K., Cruso has no memory and is a tabula rasa character. He has no sense of time and keeps no records. Cruso's refusal to keep a record of his story and life on the island marks his willful relinquishing of the self, which is probably the result of his long sojourn on the island which wipes out and engulfs his incentive to have a unique identity. His insistence on his isolation on the island, his enmity to his fellow humans (which is manifest in his hostile relationship with Susan) and refusal to have any contact with them are direct causes behind the annihilation of the self. Cruso's loss of identity is related to his life as a recluse. Susan

advises and exhorts him to write his story by trying to convince him that his personal imprint is what would personalize him, since otherwise he would be merely a castaway with nothing special to distinguish him from others. He would be a mere nobody, but if he writes his story, he could escape from his anonymous existence and acquire a self. Susan here emerges as the Eros or life-giving force that fights against Thanatos or death that threatens to eradicate one's self and identity.

The threat of the annihilated self is also evident in Susan's father's name, which is originally Berton but "became corrupted in the mouths of strangers" (Coetzee, 10), and hence became Barton. It reveals the threat of the annihilation of identity by outside forces, and explains why Susan is depicted as a person threatened with self-loss who is continually fighting for self-preservation.

The loss and annihilation of Susan's self is further emphasized in the fact that when Susan returns to England, she lives in Foe's house, since she has no home of her own. By lacking a home and a "room of her own" (Gallagher, 176), which was women's plight as Virginia Woolf depicted it, Coetzee emphasizes Susan's lack of identity. She also leads another person's life, namely, Foe's. Thus, she not only inhabits his home but also lives his life so that she relinquishes her own self and inhabits Foe's self. She writes to Foe in one of the many letters she sends him: "I have your table to sit at, your window to gaze through. I write with your pen on your paper and when the sheets are completed they go into your chest. So your life continues to be lived, though you are gone" (Coetzee, 65). Thus, Foe is a parasite who feeds on Susan's self even when he is not present.

Foe's existence as the host who feeds on his guest's self is emphasized by Susan when she blames him for forcing an unknown child into her life and making her claim that she is her lost daughter, when actually she bears no resemblance to the daughter she has lost. For Susan tells Foe: "She is not my daughter. Do you think women drop children and forget them as snakes lay eggs?...She is more your daughter than she ever was mine" (Coetzee, 75). Thus, Foe atomizes and bombards Susan's true self. He tries to stifle it by imposing a foreign self of his own invention on her. By attempting to silence and wipe out Susan's part from the island story and imposing on her the alien girl story, Foe reveals the writer's burden of falsehood, which brings about his self-estrangement, since it prevents him from self-expression and self-discovery. Coetzee also reveals through Foe's domineering stance over Susan that "South Africans are subject to the Scylla and Charybdis of governmental control"

(Penner, 15), which, as a result, leads to their self-estrangement by having their voices silenced and their books censored. Foe also tries to brainwash Susan into believing that this is her true self, just as K. is brainwashed by the court into believing that he is guilty, and, as a result, always assumes the position of the culprit. Susan, however, unlike K., tries to resist the forces that plot against self and identity, and refuses to yield to them by being the creation they want. Thus, “she is well aware of the ways that people falsify stories” (Gallagher, 175). She resists and tries to combat oppression.

The fact that Foe, the fictional author, is a parasite feeding on his guest (the character) is also clearly dramatized when Susan sleeps with him. At this point, Susan relates: “Foe kissed me again, and in kissing gave such a sharp bite to my lip that I cried out and drew away. But he held me close and I felt him suck the wound. ‘This is my manner of preying on the living,’ he murmured” (Coetzee, 139). What further emphasizes the fact that Foe is an agent annihilating and engulfing the self is that when he has sexual intercourse with Susan, she says: “Then he was upon me, and I might have thought myself in Crusoe’s arms again; for they were men of the same time of life, and heavy in the lower body, though neither was stout; and their way with a woman too was much the same. I closed my eyes trying to find my way back to the island, to the wind and waveroar; but no, the island was lost, cut off from me by a thousand leagues of watery waste” (Coetzee, 139). Thus, Foe brings about the total extinction of Susan’s self in this climactic moment. The irretrievable, vanishing island becomes the symbol of the loss of self and the place of belonging where it resides.

Friday, the tongueless man, is another example through which Coetzee embodies the threat of self-annihilation. Friday’s cut tongue symbolizes the eradication of self, since no identity could be established for someone whose tongueless existence prevents him from telling his story and individualizing himself. He becomes a symbol of the anonymity and blankness of man. Man emerges as an incomplete being, which Friday’s cut tongue (the symbol of the absent and castrated self) represents, just as the initial K. (in Joseph K’s name) makes of him an incomplete person with no unique self, but rather a nobody, a mere manifestation of man’s nothingness and hollowness.

Furthermore, the fact that Friday dances in Foe’s robes and wears his wig marks the extinction of his unique self, since he places himself into somebody else’s clothes and belongings so that, like Susan, he lives Foe’s life. Friday’s integration

within Foe's character again insinuates Foe's existence as a parasite on Friday. Thus, Foe is Friday's and Susan's foe, forever feeding on his characters. Friday's whirling Dionysian dance further expresses a loss of self, since it reveals his glaring unawareness of the "Cartesian split of self and other" (Gallagher, 179). For integration within a circle marks the loss of individuality. Here Coetzee expresses the belief that "the world is essentially made up of tribes" and that "the individual is nothing; the individual only realizes himself in the nation" (Penner, 9).

Through Friday, Coetzee also reveals that the absence of a self is directly related to a failure to command language, since "language is essential to preserve identity" (Gallagher, 38). One's severed connection with language also makes of the individual a servile creation of others. The self he possesses becomes defined and established by external forces and his "existence is implicated by others" (Gallagher, 179). He therefore becomes the plaything of others, a piece of dough that people can shape as they like. Others shape different selves for him according to their whims and desires, and these selves are all alien to his true self. In addition, by creating alien selves for Friday, his true self is engulfed by these intruding foreign selves. Here Coetzee points out the danger of "necklacing" (Gallagher, 37) or labeling, which is Friday's and the colonized's plight, since the colonizer imposes a definition and a label that is foreign to the native's life.

Susan sums up Friday's problem of the lost self in an address to Foe: "Friday has no command of words and therefore no defense against being re-shaped day by day in conformity with the desires of others. I say he is a cannibal and he becomes a cannibal; I say he is a laundryman and he becomes a laundryman. What is the truth of Friday?" (Coetzee, 122). Friday is like Proteus, the old man of the sea, an embodiment of different definitions and different selves, since Proteus takes different shapes, a lion, a bull, and so on, but his essence and original shape remain unknown. This explains why Susan says that "Friday is Friday," just as Proteus is Proteus. No definition of him could be verbalized or formulated. This is why he exists as a shadow and "his true reality lies elsewhere, in the inaccessible" (Kundera, 102).

In addition to the external factors that pose threats to the self, Coetzee reveals that man can be the agent of his own eradication. Man's blindness is one of these factors which drive him away from recognizing himself and his identity. This is clear in Susan's inability to recognize her daughter, who bears exactly the same name she does. Susan's inability to recognize her daughter symbolizes a loss of self and the fact

that man often gazes on himself as something strange and alien. The fact that the daughter bears the same name as her mother makes her emerge as Susan's double, the uncanny self that she fails to recognize.

Susan's inability to see herself in the child makes her conclude that the child was sent by Foe. She dismisses the child as a nobody, and asks her to "go away and not to trouble me again" (Coetzee, 77). The fact that she sends her away reveals that external forces (like Foe) serve to destroy and bring about a total loss of identity. This makes Susan the parallel to Joseph K., who in his stubborn blindness and insistence on his innocence, fails to discover his offense, and to realize that the parable related to him in the cathedral is his story. The priest is, therefore, like the Sphinx in *Oedipus Rex*, talking to K. about himself, whose blindness and narrow-mindedness distance him from the mirror that might allow him to see himself.

Like K., whose gaze is external and who is concerned with the world of the court, rather than introspection and self-discovery, Susan is driven away from self-reflection by being too concerned and absorbed by the people who might examine her life in the future. This is why she takes great pains and is so keen on searching for Foe to write her story. In fact, "the ruling passion in her life is to have her story told" (Gallagher, 173). Her excessive concern with having her story presented in book form for public scrutiny is evident in her address to Friday: "Alas, we will never make our fortunes, Friday, by being merely what we are, or were. Think of the spectacle we offer: your master and you on the terraces, I on the cliffs watching for a sail. Who would wish to read that there were once two dull fellows on a rock in the sea who filled their time by digging up stones?" (Coetzee, 83). Thus, her extreme obsession with writing manifests a willful and foolish withdrawal from the self, which parallels that of Joseph K.

Susan's self-detachment is also clear in her persistent attempts to teach Friday words, which make her focus her entire attention on him and, therefore, lose her grip on the person she might become. Friday is, therefore, a parasite that feeds on Susan. She likens him to the old man of the river whose story she relates to Foe: "There was once a fellow who took pity on an old man waiting at the riverside, and offered to carry him across. Having borne him safely through the flood, he knelt to set him down on the other side. But the old man would not leave his shoulders: no, he tightened his knees about his deliverer's neck and beat him on his flanks and, to be short, turned him into a beast of burden" (Coetzee, 148). There is an element of obligation in

Susan's concern with Friday. She desires to help him but becomes trapped in his efforts to adapt. She is like the door-keeper in Kafka's parable, 'Before the Law,' who wastes his entire life by keeping watch on the door and, as a result, is prevented from living his own life in a complete way.

As *Foe* exposes the factors that serve to bring about man's self-annihilation and estrangement, it exposes on the other extreme the factors that could help him in creating a self. One of these factors is writing. For Susan believes that the writing of her story and its being put on paper will materialize her existence - and that of Friday. (She does not know, of course, that for Friday writing means nothing and that his self only exists within the ocean, leaves and the twittering of birds on the island, and does not need to be expressed on paper). Thus, "until her story is written, Susan feels as though she lacks substance...She needs her story to be told in order to take shape as a human being" (Gallagher, 175).

Susan's belief in the role of writing in creating and immortalizing the self explains her need to have Foe proceed with writing her story so that she can be freed and "liberated from this drab existence" (Coetzee, 63) in order to become an individual rather than a ghost and a shadow. She adds that "My life is drearily suspended till your writing is done" (Coetzee, 63). Thus, she needs Foe with his pen to give her substance and body, to breathe life into her lifeless, ghostly existence. She needs to become a real person so that the story of the island is not merely Cruso's and Friday's but hers as well. Susan also looks forward to the wealth and material gain from which she will benefit if her story is written and published. "Figuratively, the wealth and freedom that she could achieve represent the ability to live a full, rich, independent and meaningful life, because she will have achieved an identity and a wholeness from the writing of her story" (Gallagher, 174).

Susan also expresses the belief that words are a means of confirming the presence of self and substantiality. She tells Foe that the words about her experience on the island and the words she wrote to him in letters are hers. She is the only person who wrote them, and this is what ensures her possession of a self. Thus, words are a means of possessing an identity, since words reflect a personal imprint and a unique self.

Another factor in preserving and creating a self is sleep. Foe explains to Susan the benefit of sleep. Through sleep, Foe says, we have the chance to "descend nightly into ourselves" and meet "our darker selves" (Coetzee, 138). Thus, it is a chance for

us to encounter our uncanny, hidden selves which are concealed by our waking life. With this encounter we can have a firm grip on ourselves and get to know and encounter ourselves. Thus, sleep is a factor that enables us to maintain a self, whereas a continual waking life is a threat to its annihilation.

Coetzee also expresses man's basic urge and need to create a self and affirm its reality. This urge is also Coetzee's urge as a writer. For Coetzee's devotion to South Africa, his "bond with the South African landscape and his reluctance to become a 'writer in exile'" (Penner, 4) is his means of self-preservation. For he says: "I would probably feel a certain sense of artificial construction if I were to write fiction set in another environment" (Penner, 20). Susan expresses the urge to cling to a self in words written to Foe: "When I reflect on my story I seem to exist only as the one who came, the one who witnessed, the one who longed to be gone: a being without a substance, a ghost beside the true body of Cruso...Return to me the substance I have lost, Mr Foe: that is my entreaty" (Coetzee, 51). Thus, Susan wants Foe to help her recapture and recreate her lost past, so that she can feel that she is somebody, not a mere shadow of Cruso's story. Moreover, she wants to exist as a person, not merely as a story-teller, because she is an actual participant in Cruso's and Friday's life on the island. Their story is, therefore, not theirs alone but hers, too.

Even though Susan resorts to Foe to help her establish a self, she refuses to be his slave until Foe writes her story. She insists on being the mistress of her own destiny and refuses to be Foe's creation. This is clear when she tells Foe: "I am not, do you see, one of those thieves or highwaymen of yours who gabble a confession and are then whipped off to Tyburn and eternal silence, leaving you to make of their stories whatever you fancy" (Coetzee, 123).

In addition, when Foe tries to brainwash Susan into believing that the girl bearing her same name is her child, she tells him: "But how can we live if we do not believe we know who we are, and who we have been?" (Coetzee, 130). She insists that this girl is not her daughter and bears no resemblance to her, and she adds that if she were a gullible person who is "a mere receptacle ready to accommodate whatever story is stuffed in me, surely you would dismiss me, surely you would say to yourself, 'This is no woman but a house of words, hollow without substance'" (Coetzee, 130). Thus, she insists on clinging to her beliefs and her notion of herself.

Susan stands up to Foe when he threatens to destroy her identity. This is why she adds: "I am not a story, Mr Foe. I may impress you as a story because I began my

account of myself without preamble, slipping overboard into the water and striking out for the shore. But my life did not begin in the waves” (Coetzee, 131). She insists on her substantiality, and tells Foe: “I am a free woman who asserts her freedom by telling her story according to her own desire” (Coetzee, 131). Thus, she refuses to be Foe’s plaything and slave. Susan, therefore, in her insistence on being free and the mistress of her own destiny, emerges as Joseph K’s foil, since K. refuses to bear any responsibility for himself but leaves his life in the hands of the court and the people around him.

However, Susan tells Foe: “The story I desire to be known by is the story of the island” (Coetzee, 121). Her indifference to the story of Bahia and the loss of her daughter reveals two things. First, her desire to relinquish the Bahia story symbolizes a relinquishing of the self (since the Bahia story is part of her). The lure and temptation of being part of the island story leads to a partial loss of self, due to her desire to be a character in a story. The story-teller (Foe) is therefore the agent and the catalyst that brings about a loss and estrangement of self. At the same time, Susan’s insistence on being known through the story of the island could have a positive aspect to it. The story of the island could be the place where her true self resides, whereas the Bahia story could be the locale of a false self. Thus, Susan’s insistence on immortalizing and breathing life into the island story could be her means of preserving her true self.

Even though Susan insists on having a self, we see her wavering between the certainty and doubt of possessing one. She embodies man’s plight of being lost in the world, searching for an identity that keeps appearing and disappearing. For Susan tells Foe: “I thought I was myself and this girl or creature from another order speaking words you made up for her. But now I am full of doubt. Nothing is left to me but doubt. I am doubt itself. Who is speaking me? Am I a phantom too? To what order do I belong? And you: who are you?” (Coetzee, 133). Thus, Susan fluctuates between certainty of being and doubt of being, which leads to her search for identity. Susan’s words, apart from highlighting her fluctuation between certainty and doubt, reveal that “the quest for the self always ends in a paradoxical dissatisfaction” (Kundera, 25). For the fundamental underlying question behind Susan’s conversation with Foe is: “If stories give us our identities and if we are written by others, do we exist for ourselves?” (Gallagher, 179).

Man's urge to create a self is also portrayed by Coetzee through Friday. The fact that Friday consistently plays a single, persistent tune on his flute seems to be his only means of establishing an identity. His singular unique tune is his means of asserting that he has a unique self. Susan also infers that Friday's immersion in a circular dance is his means of transporting himself from his life in England to return to his former life in Africa or to Crusoe's island where he belongs. For the dance puts him in a kind of trance through which he can escape from his unfamiliar surroundings and return to his familiar milieu where his true self resides. Thus, the dance is the means by which the self could be restored. The dance, one realizes, is a double-edged weapon since it serves both to restore and annihilate the self.

The doubtful girl who is supposed to be Susan's daughter is another example of man's overpowering urge to cling to a self and a substantial existence. The girl insists that Susan is her mother and tells her: "You are my mother, I have found you, and now I will not leave you" (Coetzee, 78). This attitude symbolizes man's urgent desire to hold on to a self and an origin so as to escape the fate of having a selfless and anonymous existence. Thus, Coetzee in this way reveals and emphasizes man's condition of self-alienation, since he continually embarks on a journey and carries out an investigation, like Joseph K., to search for an unknown identity.

Like Kafka, Coetzee also highlights the problem of the questionable and doubtful existence of the self. The different stories that Crusoe relates about himself and the impossibility of clinging to an original story and identity represent not only man's self-estrangement, but also the vanishing self which is lost like the ship that brought Crusoe to the island. Just as it is impossible for Susan to dive and retrieve tools from the wreck, it is impossible to retrieve Crusoe's lost self. The various stories that he tells about himself express Coetzee's view of the questionable and doubtful existence of a self. They also express and emphasize that each man has plural selves and characters in one person. Hermann Broch claims that "it takes several lives to make one person" (Kundera, 56). Thus, defining a singular self is an impossibility. In fact, Coetzee himself embodies several lives as "J.M. Coetzee the teller of tales, the illusionist, the fabulist and wordsmith" (Penner, 21). The fact that Crusoe does not keep a journal also suggests that the self cannot be preserved or maintained. For there is no record to give a hint to future castaways about Crusoe's identity. He lives as an enigma and he dies as a riddle that no one can solve. The absence of a hint or clue that

would reveal Cruso's identity is Coetzee's means of voicing the highly doubtful existence of a self in the first place.

This problem is also apparent through the character of Susan, who has the ability to adapt to any place. Once she leaves Cruso's island, which was at first a strange, uninhabitable place for her, she longs to go back to it and feels that it is her home, thus emphasizing Cruso's belief that not every castaway is lost, since the place on which he is stranded could be the place where he feels at home. Then when she goes back to England and lives in Foe's home, she at first feels uncomfortable in it. She then writes to Foe, in reference to his home: "I feel as we feel toward the home we were born in. All the nooks and crannies, all the odd hidden corners of the garden, have an air of familiarity, as if in a forgotten childhood I here played games of hide and seek" (Coetzee, 66). The fact that Susan adapts so quickly suggests that her possession of a unique self, which manifests itself in having a settled home, is totally absent and perhaps questionable.

When Susan's supposed girl sobs and tells Susan that she has forgotten her, Susan exclaims, "I have not forgotten you, for I never knew you" (Coetzee, 174). This reveals that she does not know herself, since she fails to recognize her daughter. When the girl claims that Susan is her mother, she is told by her: "You are father-born. You have no mother. The pain you feel is the pain of lack, not the pain of loss. What you hope to regain in my person you have in truth never had" (Coetzee, 91). Here Coetzee suggests through the motherless child that the existence of a self may be myth, since the existence of the motherless child suggests that man lacks an origin. Later, Foe asks Susan about the daughter she lost in Bahia and attempted to find: "Is she substantial or is she a story too?" (Coetzee, 152). He thus implies that Susan herself is a story, and casts doubt on her genuine reality.

Coetzee also poses the problem of the self through Friday. For the absence of a definite definition of Friday, whose speechlessness makes him the object of conjecture, turns him into a symbol of man's hollowness and lack of self. Susan says of Friday: "He is the child of his silence, a child unborn, a child waiting to be born that cannot be born" (Coetzee, 122). He is "unborn" because he has no self to breathe life into his body, and he "cannot be born" because his silence makes it impossible for anyone to materialize and individualize him. He therefore remains unborn and anonymous to the world. Friday's silence and speechlessness, which prevent Susan from identifying him and eternalizes his existence as an "unborn" child, is Coetzee's

way of saying that the existence of the self may be an illusion. Friday's inability to present a self seems to be the only message that his silence conveys.

It is worth mentioning that Friday's silence also could be his means of protecting and sheltering the self inside him, since by verbalizing it, the self is threatened with annihilation and distortion. Thus, as Kafka is a door-keeper to his works, Friday is a door-keeper to the self he possesses, keeping it safe and secure within himself and never allowing it to enter the world and face life's dangers. It remains "unborn" and embedded within him as he is "unborn" to the world and remains sheltered in his mother's womb. His attitude could parallel Kafka's unfulfilled will of having his books destroyed, rather than published. For as Kafka may have wanted to withhold his books to spare them from false criticism, Friday actualizes the salvation of his story by engulfing and embedding it within him.

The problem of the absence of a unique self is also presented by Coetzee through the figure of Foe. Foe plays the double role of writer-reader. He, like Proteus, takes different shapes so that identifying his essential nature becomes an impossible task. Thus, the self is unreachable and intangible, like Joseph K's concealed and invisible judge, who in his unapproachability, stands as an eternal threat and confirmation of the impossibility of K's arrival at self-discovery.

Coetzee, like Kafka, delineates the role of external forces in instilling man's self-alienation through his dependence on these forces to establish his identity. Susan is dependent on the writer Daniel Foe to write her story and establish an identity for herself and Friday, since she begins to "doubt the substantiality of her experiences, her story, and herself" (Penner, 118). Thus, when she searches for Foe, she is not only in search of an author, but "of her own ontology" (Penner, 121). However, creation of an identity is not established from within but is external. Just as Joseph K. pursues the court and its officials to determine the nature of his offense, Susan perpetually pursues Foe and clings to him to create a self for her and Friday.

However, Foe, as his name indicates, turns out to be an enemy. Instead of creating a self for her, he serves to annihilate and bring about its total destruction, since he attempts to write a false story about her to please the readers. (Foe is here the parallel to Coetzee, who alters and deforms *Robinson Crusoe* by imposing the story of *Foe* on it. Therefore, the writer is a destroyer and an enemy to the survival of the self.) Just as the picture of the magistrate that K. sees makes of him a God-like figure, Susan perceives Foe to be a God-like figure. She thinks of him as "a steersman

steering the great hulk of the house through the nights and days, peering ahead for signs of storms” (Coetzee, 50). She sees him as the prescriber of her destiny and her words comment on “his God-like control” (Penner, 178). But unlike K., who is forever servile to the court and its officials, Susan is always wavering between servility to Foe and rebellion against him.

Susan at one point writes to Foe: “Days pass. Nothing changes. We hear no word from you, and the townsfolk pay us no more heed than if we were ghosts” (Coetzee, 87). She again emphasizes the fact that she and Friday have no substantiality, and this is why they are treated by everybody as if they were non-existent. Thus, Foe is the savior on whom they depend, since he is the one who is expected to bring them back to life, to bring about their departure from Hades and their entrance into the world of the living.

Finally, in addition to exposing man’s dire self-alienation through his inability to form an internal and individual self-perception, Coetzee, like Kafka, presents the painful problem of man’s alienation from his human self. This is apparent through the character of Cruso. Coetzee reveals that Cruso is not only alienated from the self but also from his human self and his humanity. When Susan relates her tale of woe and the misfortune that brought about her desertion on his island, Cruso “gazed at me more as if I were a fish cast up by the waves than an unfortunate fellow-creature” (Coetzee, 9). Through his coldness, indifference and clotted emotions, he epitomizes the detachment of man from his fellow man and his estrangement from all human feelings such as sympathy and compassion. Cruso’s alienation from his human self is finally manifest in the fact that he has no desire for Susan as a woman. He seems to have lost all contact with human sensations and with manly feelings and is reduced to an imitation of a human being.

Chapter Two

The World as a Strange Place

I am standing on the platform of the tram, utterly unsure of my place in this world, in this city, in my family.

Franz Kafka, "The Passenger"

It is a twilight world, a dark world, a world in which one goes out into the labyrinthine town without having anything to do there, a world in which one is alone, knowing neither who he is nor whose son or father or lover he is, nor perhaps whether he is a man.

Franz Kafka, "Preparations for a Wedding in the Country"

As the self emerges as a stranger and an alien, the world also emerges as a strange, unfamiliar place in which man cannot find his bearings and is continually lost and unable to find a place of belonging in it. The world's assumption of an 'unheimlich' face which man cannot comprehend instills in him a sense of homelessness and desolation, and also the longing for a once-familiar world. This world would offer him the opportunity to overcome his predicament of being a stranger and an outsider who cannot be incorporated into the universe.

In *The Trial*, Kafka depicts man's estrangement from the world and explores the different causes behind his alienation from the world and his isolation from the human species. Through Joseph K's ordeal, Kafka reveals that man's alienation from the world stems from its becoming an alien place with many perplexities and complications. For like most Kafkan heroes, Joseph K. wakes up into a nightmare to find himself "exposed to an incomprehensible fate, as to a sharp, cold wind" (Politzer, 346). He wakes up to find himself in an absurd and inexplicable situation of groundless condemnation and accusation. The strange court of law before which he is

tried and the soulless, ignorant and insipid warders who come to arrest him without offering an explanation parallel the absurdity and incomprehensibility of the world. It is a “world of uncertainty and insecurity, of fear and trembling” (Warren, 106).

“You ask for sense and you are putting on the most senseless exhibition yourself” (Kafka, 10). This is what K. tells the supervisor when he tells him that there is no sense in telephoning a lawyer to defend him. K., therefore, realizes that this is a senseless world that has a logic of its own. It is a world he cannot decipher or fit into. “It is a world seen slightly askew” (Warren, 112). K. seems to be lost in a world which resembles that of “Plato’s cave which a malicious God has paneled with mirrors. The prisoner thirsting for true knowledge now perceives actual shapes, not shades, yet the concave walls of the cave reflect these forms in grotesque distortions” (Draper, 1948).

The fact that K. finds himself thrown into an uncanny and absurd situation parallels, or rather dramatizes, Kierkegaard’s description of the plight of modern man who is thrown into the universe and struggles to deal with it through this plight which is not of his choosing. Like Joseph K., who is summoned for an unknown and invisible reason, “man is called into this world, he is appointed in it, but wherever he turns to fulfill his calling he comes up against the thick vapors of a mist of absurdity” (Politzer, 179).

Joseph K.’s plunge into an absurd and ambiguous situation and Frau Grubach’s comment: “What things happen in this world!” (Kafka, 15) reveal Kafka’s view of the world as a storehouse of strange occurrences in which man becomes an Alice in Wonderland. He reflects “a universal discord, a break between man and his world” (Politzer, 334). Furthermore, Kafka not only depicts an incomprehensible world, but he also draws attention to the idea that all attempts at understanding it are useless and unnecessary. He shows that one should just accept the world with all its strangeness and inscrutability since all attempts at deciphering its mysteries are futile. In fact, Frau Grubach tells K. that his arrest “seems to me like something scholarly which I don’t understand, but which one doesn’t have to understand either” (Kafka, 15). Frau Grubach’s words evoke the “sense of life as not being inherently meaningful” (Josipovici, 15), which runs throughout almost all of Kafka’s works.

In addition to the problem of the world’s incomprehensibility, Kafka’s *The Trial* explores other causes behind man’s estrangement from the world. The curse of exclusion is another direct cause of man’s alienation from the world. *The Trial* is “a

story about a man always awaiting judgment” (*The Trial*, ix). The fact that Joseph K. is always awaiting judgment and the pronouncement of his offense highlights his position as an excluded, rejected stranger from the world. Joseph K. is never seen as being part of or assimilated into the world, but rather, as marginalized and completely “disconnected from the rest of the world” (Szanto, 20).

K. always assumes the position of the accused, condemned culprit. He is doomed to live the life of the exile and the frowned upon individual. Joseph K’s doom is the doom of “man alone, man hunted and haunted, man confronted with powers which elude him, man prosecuted and persecuted. He is the man eager to do right but perpetually baffled and thwarted and confused as to what it is to do right...the man in search of salvation” (Warren, 116) and eager for inclusion and acceptance.

K. always feels rejected by the world. When the bank manager sends him on a business assignment outside the office, he does not feel valued due to his distinction and ability, but senses suspicion against him. He believes that others are taking every opportunity to get him out of the office so that they can check on his work, or even try to cause trouble by plotting against him or turning his clients against him. He always feels that he is being watched and under the surveillance of the deputy manager. Thus, K. emerges as a man against the universe. He always feels that the whole world is plotting against him. His suspicion of everyone, which heightens his sense of non-belonging and exile symbolizes “man’s forlornness in a wintry world” (Politzer, 88).

The world’s hostility, which dooms man to endlessly grope its corners in utter loss and helplessness, is further emphasized by Kafka through the atmosphere of darkness that prevails everywhere in *The Trial*. K. is always lost in an endless cycle of darkness and opacity, striving to find the light that would guide him out of his bat-like existence. He is always alone and wandering in isolation. He has no companion or friend to trust. Instead, he always lives in doubt and is suspicious of everyone. Wherever he goes, he feels that someone is watching him and planning to trick and harm him.

Thus, the world emerges as a place in which man has to watch out and be heedful of the conspiracies and ambushes laid for him. It is not a place where he could live in peace and ease and feel at home. It emerges as a place of punishment and expulsion. It becomes “the place where we went astray, it is the fact of our being astray” (Altmann, 51) and the place in which man keeps waiting and yearning for his lost paradise of belonging. Man’s life and struggle on earth is, therefore, a

confirmation of the fact that “mankind has lost its home” (Altmann, 53) and that man is “the exile from Paradise, who tries to gain Life but who is not able to take the road to Sinai” (Altmann, 53).

K’s endless loss in darkness, and the fact that we find him always “trying to get his bearings in the darkness” (Kafka, 84), symbolize Kafka’s view of the world as a trap or a labyrinth. This is evident in the endless corridors and passageways leading to the court offices which Joseph K. strives to enter and which reveal Kafka’s portrayal of the world as a maze. The world is a place of unfamiliarity in which he gets lost and bewildered. This absence of the feeling of belonging and familiarity is what intensifies man’s sense of alienation. Kafka’s depiction of the world as a labyrinth and his exploration of K’s possibilities of existence and attempts to escape this maze, therefore, reveal that his novel is “an investigation of human life in the trap the world has become” (Kundera, 26).

In addition, the fact that the court usher tells K. “there’s only one way” (Kafka, 52), when K. asks him to guide him through the court rooms and show him the way, reveals that K. is the only person who cannot see or know the way when it has become obvious. K’s problem or flaw seems to be a problem of blindness and insight. He fails to see and perceive things clearly and this is why he needs someone to guide him. His Oedipus-like blindness is what estranges and isolates him and makes him feel out of place in the world. Furthermore, his blindness is something of his own choosing. For when the usher tells him: “you haven’t seen everything yet” (Kafka, 52) on their way to the court offices, K. says: “ I don’t want to see everything” (Kafka, 52). Thus, he refuses to open his eyes to everything around him, and this is what leads to his exile from the world. His withdrawal and desolation in the world is, therefore, his own doing.

K’s estrangement from the world is also evident in the fact that he fails to see that the three men, Rabensteiner, Kullych, and Kaminer, whom the court ask to accompany K. to the bank, are actually officials from the bank he works in and are not total strangers and people he is seeing for the first time as he assumes. Thus, K. is a man who is isolated and cloistered. He is blind to the obvious things in his life and he fails to recognize what he sees everyday. Joseph K’s blindness, therefore, symbolizes “man’s unfamiliarity with his familiar surroundings and his alienation on earth” (Politzer, 12).

Through K's unseeing and unperceptive eyes, Kafka not only reveals the individual's hamartia of blindness as a cause of alienation, but he also reveals the inability to recognize what is supposed to be familiar. He dismisses the familiar as totally unfamiliar, as the effect of external forces and a direct result of living in an oppressive situation. Kafka makes clear through Joseph K's blank memory and blind eyes that oppression can serve to obliterate a person's memory about his world and surroundings, since it absorbs him in alien demands and causes him to forget his true possibilities.

Thus, K. becomes absorbed in the warders, supervisor and the entire world of the court and loses his grasp of his world. This shows the effect of oppression in annihilating and eradicating one's sense of awareness and familiarity with the world. It has the effect of creating an individual who lives as if he is living his life for the first time, or whose life resembles a dream. We see in Joseph K's situation the recurrent Kafkaian situation of "the protagonist who knows only that the change that has taken place has separated him from the life he had been leading" and is now, as a result of this change, thrown into "the new world" (Szanto, 24).

Through Joseph K's predicament, Kafka brings in another factor behind man's alienation from the world, namely, difference and otherness. K's problem of non-belonging and estrangement is evident in the fact that he feels like a fish out of water in the court rooms. He finds it difficult to breathe in such an atmosphere. K's situation is symbolic of man's situation in the world. He feels out of place and alienated not only because he cannot comprehend the world but also because it is different from what he knows. He cannot be assimilated to it. Joseph K. "who still believes himself to be acting within the context of his old world at last feels the absence of context in a world void of related objects and beings" (Szanto, 31).

The glaring reality of this world reveals itself in the illogical, random, corrupt and absurd law which tries K. but is different from the law or the notion he has of the law. The immoral magistrates who belong to the world of the court are also totally alien to his view of magistrates. This striking difference and unfamiliarity makes him a wanderer, and his life emerges as one that "seems to be doomed to be lived always in the wilderness" (Josipovici, 17).

When K. tells the court usher, "I don't want to see everything" (Kafka, 52), this is not only a sign of his blindness and unseeing eyes, but also a sign of his willful refusal to see things around him because of the corrupt and loathsome nature of the

law. The ugly aspect of the judicial system and the authorities makes him feel that he cannot breathe in this uncanny terra incognita. He feels that he has glimpsed something unbearably terrible and horrible. "In a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels [himself] an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity" (Camus, 13).

This plunge into absurdity is what makes K. feel that he "does not want to penetrate any further" (Kafka, 52) into this world which is unfit for him to inhabit. "What he seems to crave is a drink from the river Lethe that would make him forget the action the Law has brought against him" (Politzer, 196). As he enters the court offices K. feels that he is on another planet. He also becomes physically weak in the suffocating atmosphere of the court offices. He feels "as if he were seasick" (Kafka, 57) and as though "he was on a ship plunging on heavy seas" (Kafka, 57).

He becomes totally helpless and is at the mercy of the girl and the information officer who have to support him as they lead him out of the court offices. K's pressing demand to escape his Odysseus-like descent into the underworld of the court offices parallels his continual search for a proper atmosphere in which he can breathe. Everywhere he goes, he finds the air oppressive and suffocating, just as Gregor Samsa in "The Metamorphosis" finds the choicest food unacceptable (Politzer, 75). Man's existence as an alienated being on earth assumes the form of his endless search for Ithaka or a place of belonging in an alien universe.

Kafka also reveals through K's dilemma that alienation and estrangement from the world is not only a result of cosmic separation but also that it is a result of man's separation and distance from everything and everybody around him. Like Gregor Samsa, who in his beetle-body emerges as "something alien that cannot be made to fit into the human world" (Corngold, 130), since he is the unacceptable Other, Joseph K. also emerges as the Other who cannot be included and assimilated into the world. This is clear in the fact that K. finds himself thrown into an uncanny situation in which he is under arrest, but at the same time allowed to lead his normal way of life. Thus, he is both free and imprisoned. His tantalizing limbo-like residence and oscillation between freedom and confinement is what establishes his difference from his fellow human beings, and he feels as if he is a freak of nature. K's "dreadful singularity imprisons him in a mania that separates him from the world" (Alberes,

58). Furthermore, his acute awareness of his difference and peculiarity is what makes him feel that he is being watched and under surveillance.

In *The Trial*, Kafka raises another problem behind man's estrangement from the world and his feeling of being an outsider to it. This problem is the world's silence and dumbness in which man is doomed to roam "in a void without a defined context" (Szanto, 32). There are several incidents in *The Trial* in which Kafka portrays the problem of the world's taciturn nature, which stands as an eternal threat to man since it eternalizes his banishment and exclusion. The court officials, who are dressed in black suits, invade K's room and declare his arrest, are like the Fates who weave man's destiny. Their presence is "to be accepted without query" (Kafka, 1). They symbolize the silence of the world and its refusal to offer any answers that would explain and unravel its mysteries. Thus, K's questions are met with no answers as if to stress that man has no right to receive explanations and be admitted into the world of clarity and certainty.

The black suits worn by the warders and the atmosphere of ambiguity and silence that surrounds them emerge as a symbol of the threat of death (Thanatos) that pervades human existence. For "to be alive in Kafka's sense does not mean to exist. It means understanding one's place in the world" (Josipovici, 21). Joseph K's failure and inability to arrive at this understanding, therefore, marks his position as an existent but not as a living man. This is why he is "doomed to a perpetual wandering about the world, never laid to rest" (Josipovici, 21), forever seeking to escape from mere existence into actual living.

The parable, 'Before the Law,' which the prison chaplain tells K., further demonstrates the world's silence and its resistance to interpretation and explanation. It is a "world deprived of meaning" (Politzer, 345). The parable, which is K's story and every man's story, symbolizes man's struggle to explain the puzzle of life by being initiated into its mysteries. The fact that the man from the country struggles all his life to gain admittance into the law but is denied this entry symbolizes man's never-ending struggle to unravel life's mysteries.

The door-keeper, who guards the door of the law and never gives the man from the country any satisfactory answer that would calm his fears, emerges as the "spokesman of a universe totally unconcerned with the information seeker and is radically hostile to him. This universe answers man's claim for direction with an icy silence" (Politzer, 13). The parable, which is a miniature of the novel and a synopsis

of man's plight in the universe, is Kafka's way of saying that the world is a riddle that one cannot solve and a silly joke which is terrible but not funny. In fact, Joseph K. sees his situation as "a joke, a crude joke" (Kafka, 3) and this in itself parallels Kafka's view of life as something ridiculous and puzzling. In this puzzling world, man becomes a being who is forever involved in a "problem-solving activity" forever facing the "impossible task of penetrating the puzzling relations of his world which is of impossible dimensions and he cannot but despair of comprehending its overwhelming and mysterious forces" (Corngold, 133).

Joseph K's confusion and ignorance of the secrets of the world, therefore, make of him a helpless wanderer and roamer living on the borders and margins of life without knowing the way. He lives the life of the spectator and observer rather than that of the participant. He is, therefore, a living-dead inhabitant of Eliot's Waste Land or a character of Beckett's bleak landscape of the Absurd. In his attempt to escape this waste land and absurd landscape, Joseph K. attempts to combat the world's silence and the ominous question mark that stands before him as a fatal threat. Wherever he goes and whoever he meets, he encounters many endless questions. He cannot be satisfied with any silent state of being, and "he is forever interrogating the world" (Thorlby, 82). He is continually presented as searching for the oracle that would answer his questions and explain the puzzle of life to him.

The people K. encounters, like the court officials, the advocate Huld and Leni, the advocate's nurse, are supposed to help him, guide him and explain things to him. However, they only add to his confusion and complicate matters. He finds himself struggling with symbols and signs as he struggles to decode the hieroglyphics of the world, which every character represents. For most of the characters K. encounters are situated in an atmosphere of darkness, symbolizing the hollowness, concealment and gaps in the world. This is why K. feels estranged from the world and is seen as an individual or, rather, a petty creature struggling against the universe, since the more help he seeks, the more confused and alienated he becomes. The people who are sought as an aid and a means of calming him down only add to his worries and perplexities.

In K's struggle with silence and gaps, it becomes obvious that there is always a block and an obstacle to his ability to comprehend things around him. After he is chosen as a tour-guide by the bank because of his knowledge of Italian, K. converses with an Italian businessman only to realize that he "understood the Italian only

fragmentarily” (Kafka, 156). The businessman speaks “a dialect which seemed to have no relationship to the Italian K. knew” (Kafka, 156). We learn that his moustache “concealed the lip movements which might have helped K. understand” (Kafka, 156). Thus, in K’s struggle to interpret the signs and symbols of the world, he is always met with resistance, blockage and veils. It is therefore extremely ironic that K., the one who is lost, alienated and needs to be guided out of his confusion, is the one who is chosen to guide the traveler through the town. His situation is similar to that of a blind man guiding another blind man.

The blockages and veils that K. encounters everywhere make one conclude that the world is a place of impenetrability. “The world is a totality, but man is outside it, and he cannot penetrate its surface” (Szanto, 21). Kafka makes this obvious through his portrayal of the law and the highest court as being inaccessible to anyone, just as the secret and meaning of the world is denied to man. Kafka also makes this clear in the picture of the examining magistrate “sitting on a high throne-like chair” (Kafka, 85), which symbolizes that the law is unapproachable for man. In addition, Leni, the advocate’s nurse, tells K. that “the top officials keep out of sight” (Kafka, 85). This is a world in which only a few things, if ever, are revealed, but many other things are concealed. It seems that “there is no light in this world” (Politzer, 20).

The world in its impenetrability and concealment is, therefore, presented as a prison or a trap. It is a world of closed doors. For wherever K. goes, he finds himself trapped and facing doors he cannot open or enter. When he goes to visit the painter Titorelli and finds the hot and stuffy air unbearable, he asks if he could open the window, but the painter tells him: “No... it’s a pane of fixed glass, it can’t be opened” (Kafka, 122). Thus, this is a world of enclosures in which one is entangled and imprisoned. As a result, K. is overcome by the “feeling of being completely cut off from fresh air in this place...which made him feel dizzy” (Kafka, 122).

Kafka, however, perhaps suggests that there is a solution or a means of coping with the world’s impenetrability, absurdity and puzzling nature. “Why can’t you just accept your position?” (Kafka, 4). This is the question that the warder Franz asks K. in his endless attempts to find answers to his questions. Here, the warder seems to imply that K’s only means of escaping his state of alienation and exclusion is by accepting the world as it is without asking questions or doubting. In a similar way, Gregor Samsa and his family in “The Metamorphosis” never ask how his transformation could have occurred, but accept it “as if Gregor woke up with a very

bad cold” (Thiher, 42). By questioning, one enters into a state of doubt and confusion, since one question stimulates an endless series of questions. Thus, Franz seems to offer K. one means of survival in this strange world.

In addition, Franz advises K. in his restless and agitated condition when he is arrested and ignorant of the nature of his offense to “go to your room, keep calm, and wait to see what will be decreed about you. We advise you not to disturb yourself with useless thoughts but to pull yourself together; great demands will be made on you” (Kafka, 6). This advice, which is reminiscent of the physician’s advice to Marlow in Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*: “Du calme, du calme” (Conrad, 38) as he is about to set out for Africa, is the key to survival in this incomprehensible, grotesque and incredible world. This also may be Kafka’s advice to any human being who is lost in a puzzling world.

It is evident from *The Trial* and several other works that Kafka is concerned not merely with the alienation of the individual but with the plight of the alienated writer or artist. For who can give perfect expression to the anxiety and extreme suffering of exclusion and non-assimilation more than Kafka, a Czech-Jew who does not feel at home in Germany because of his national and ethnic origin, but is also estranged from the Czech community because of his use of German? He was “a personality longing for integration” (Osborne, 48) always feeling that he is “a man without a country, without a people” (Osborne, 115).

In fact, Kafka’s feeling of alienation and non-belonging was heightened in his own country, and his residence in Prague was another deep and terrible experience of estrangement rather than a homecoming. Kafka’s plight, which is modern man’s plight, discloses “inaccessibility of home and shelter as the natural condition of man” (Pascal, 171). His plight parallels the plight of the protagonist of his short-story, “Home-Coming,” who feels more estranged when he returns to his country and reaches his parents’ home. He stands hesitantly before the door and feels that he cannot open it and enter, since he feels that he is a total stranger to the place rather than a person belonging to it. In fact, almost all of Kafka’s writings dramatize “the sense of rootlessness he felt as a German-speaking Jew living in a predominantly Czech-speaking Christian world” (Encyclopedia Americana, 276).

Joseph K’s sense of estrangement and non-belonging and his endless and persistent attempt to discover the nature of his offense in order to establish his position in the world parallel Kafka’s condition of being an outsider in Germany and

Prague, and his endless striving to search for a place of belonging somewhere in the world. Kafka, the most isolated and self-imprisoned of men, forever living on the periphery of society is, in fact, the embodiment of alienation in its various forms. For he was doomed to eternal “wandering like a sleepwalker...groping for the Promised Land” (Alberes, 79).

Kafka's residence within and existence as literature served not only to alienate him from himself but also from his world. Kafka says about *The Trial*: “I can once more carry on a conversation with myself” (*The Trial*, xv). The fact that the novel is a conversation with himself reveals his isolation from the world through his hermitage in writing. His position as an outsider is evident in the fact that he cannot or does not seem to desire to communicate with the world. Like the burrow in his short-story, “The Burrow,” which “pictures a frightened animal digging a long and tortuous tunnel in which to hide itself from the noises and dangers in the world” (Durant, 265), Kafka, the lonely hermit of Prague, was “sealed alive inside his own literary creation...He plunged to the bottom of the abyss...Orpheus descended to the underworld and would not return to the surface” (Alberes, 79).

In addition, when Kafka says “once more,” he implies that all his works are conversations with himself and that there is an adamant blockage between him and the world. For him, the world is a strange place in which, like Joseph K., he could not breathe. Kafka was also an alien to the world since wherever he went he suffered from non-belonging. He was also an alien to it since he chose to live the nameless existence of literature, which parallels the nameless heroes he created. In fact, “the completeness with which Kafka's hero has severed his connections with the world is reflected in his loss of any name” (Thorlby, 69) or in the unknown initial he bears.

The predicament of the alienated and non-belonging writer is not only made evident in *The Trial* through Joseph K., the protagonist who is always rejected and awaits judgment. Titorelli is a painter who lives alone in a dark and dirty attic room. His paintings are all identical, since all of them are moorland scenes. Thus, the artist is presented as being physically and mentally isolated from his world. Through Titorelli, who seems to be the perfect painter and precursor of Beckett's bleak landscapes and who, like Joseph K., is a Sisyphus-figure indulging in a single, unproductive activity, Kafka presents art as a world of sterility and death. Unlike gifted artists who paint different things and who find it difficult to produce two identical works, here art is sterile and the artist is obsessed with a single idea. His

obsession with a single idea symbolizes his alienation from the world, since he fails to see its varied aspects. He is also alienated from the varied and fertile spirit of art. Through the narrow-minded and monomaniacal Titorelli, Kafka seems to be saying that art, like the world, could be a trap in which the artist becomes the captive of a single idea and fails to see or present anything else.

The plight of the artist as an outsider and an alien to the world and “the problem of man’s separation from his environment” (Szanto, 42) is expressed in the most climactic manner by Kafka in his short-story, “A Hunger Artist.” Here Kafka presents an artist who spends his entire life caged, put on display and fasting. The question, as to why he has chosen to fast, is finally answered shortly before he dies: “because I couldn’t find the food I liked. If I had found it; believe me, I should have made no fuss and stuffed myself like you or anyone else” (Kafka, 277). This answer reveals the extremity of the artist’s, the writer’s and man’s alienation from the world. For the writer emerges as suffering from “a hunger to which this world does not cater with the proper nourishment” (Heller, 35). Just as Joseph K. is unable to breathe anywhere, the hunger artist cannot find the proper nourishment that would make him continue living. The fact that he finds all food inedible parallels the writer’s lack of reconciliation with the world, which was Kafka’s terrible doom. In fact, Kafka saw life as a curse and a punishment for man. He described our world as being “a bad mood of God, a bad day of his” (Benjamin, 113).

The writer’s terrible doom of being an outsider and an exile from the world is also expressed in Kafka’s short-story, “First Sorrow,” in which he presents a trapeze artist who “never came down from his trapeze by night or day” (Kafka, 446). The artist’s refusal to descend from his bar and interact with the world parallels the writer’s sojourn in a world of his own, his extreme seclusion and isolation, and his choice and clinging to “solitude as a prerequisite, almost a symbol of the *littérateur*’s existence” (Politzer, 49). His exclamation with tearful eyes: “Only the one bar in my hands – how can I go on living!” (Kafka, 448) reveals the extent of his alienation from the world, since he claims that he cannot survive with only one bar but needs two, not realizing that by having two bars he is widening the gap that already exists between him and the world.

His exclamation also denotes another meaning which is: how could he go on living in the world when he is familiar with nothing but his one bar or his art? Thus, once the artist decides to descend from his ivory tower and encounter the world, he

will find nothing but the fearful doom of existing as an alien and a stranger, since his art offers him the only possible place of refuge. The expression of this fear of loss and desolation, and the writer's helplessness and fragility in a strange world, are evident in the trapeze artist's abundant tears and sobs as he gives expression to his sorrow. He is presented as a helpless child wandering with tearful eyes searching for the womb or his place of belonging in the universe.

The position of the writer as an outsider and an outcast is also expressed by Kafka in "The Metamorphosis." For Gregor Samsa, the beetle-man who suffers from the hostility and rejection of his family, represents the writer who struggles for inclusion and assimilation. Samsa, in his beetle condition, reveals the writer as an alienated being. His conversion into a beast expresses the writer's alienation as well as "human alienation" (Draper, 1945). Furthermore, the family's hostility towards Samsa symbolizes the world's hostility to the writer as well as towards man. Through Samsa's predicament, Kafka reveals that "man is as hopelessly and inappropriately situated in the world as a beetle would be in a human family" (Thorlby, 40).

It is also worth mentioning that Samsa's mother's and sister's removal of his furniture from his room, which bring about his utter misery, since everything he knows and all that belongs to him is snatched away from him, symbolizes the world's assumption of an uncanny, unfamiliar and different face in which the individual feels out of place and desolated. This act suggests "the intrusion of an alien world... The world has been wrenched out of recognition" (Draper, 1949). Samsa, therefore, feels that he is homeless, and it is as if he is stranded on an island once his furniture is removed. He lives among his family "as a total stranger and lives in their midst in the state of exile. His seclusion from the family is shown physically and literally by his locking the door of his room when he retires" (Corngold, 169). Samsa's metamorphosis into a beetle also represents the writer's "tendency to retire, to retreat from the world" (Corngold, 172) and live the ostracized, secluded existence of a beetle. In addition, just as Samsa is brushed away and thrown into the dustbin when he dies, the writer also lives in the horrible fear and anxiety of being swept away by society.

Through Samsa's metamorphosis, Kafka also reveals the effect of literature on the writer and on any person who truly understands and appreciates it. Literature "transforms the world beyond recognition," and, as a result, man feels alienated and homeless in it, just as Samsa feels homeless in his own home. In fact, Samsa's

homelessness parallels Kafka's situation with his family. He expresses his predicament when he claimed that "I live with my family, the best, most loving persons – and yet I am stranger than a stranger... I have not the slightest thing to say to them... I lack any sense of family life; at best, I am simply an observer" (Alberes, 42). Kafka gives expression to his complete alienation when he says: "I abandon life as easily as I close my eyes" (Alberes, 44). He dismisses the world as totally irrelevant to his existence. His art involves "withdrawing into himself and creating a wall between himself and the outside world" (Alberes, 55).

The South African writer J.M. Coetzee, like Kafka, presents in his novel, *Foe*, a profound depiction of man's estrangement from the world, and explores the different causes and factors that create this dreary condition. As Kafka reveals man's ordeal of estrangement from the world through Joseph K's awakening one morning to find himself immersed in an unfathomable situation, J.M. Coetzee voices the same view of the world as an uncanny, unfamiliar place in which man exists as an alien. This is clear in Susan Barton, the central character and female narrator. Susan Barton, like Joseph K., wakes up from her slumbers to find herself stranded on a strange place, namely, Crusoe's island.

The uncanniness of the place Susan is marooned on is not merely due to its being a place she has not been to before, but is related to the nature of its inhabitants, namely, Crusoe and his manservant Friday. In her encounter with Crusoe, Susan discovers a strange mentality. Crusoe is a storehouse of negative qualities such as resistance to change, stasis, insipidity, tyranny and despotism, misanthropy, coldness and indifference, in addition to being the representative of the living-dead. His negative qualities that can never match hers stand as a damnable threat against her ability to communicate and integrate with this world. Thus, Susan's alienation is a very acute one because it is both an actual, physical one of being separated from one's home, and an even more painful one, since it involves encountering a strange mind and a strange way of thinking.

In addition to the world's uncanniness, which is represented and embodied in Crusoe and Friday, Coetzee poses the problem of the world's incomprehensibility. This becomes apparent when Susan comments on her situation on Crusoe's island. For in it she not only expresses her predicament as a stranger on an island of male inhabitants, but also expresses the human condition in the way that she lives in a world that has no

clear meaning. Instead, it is a world that has a logic of its own that man cannot fathom. It is “unreasonable, thirsty for meaning” (Camus, ix). The nature of this world is made clear in Susan’s words: “Chance had cast me on his island, chance had thrown me in his arms. In a world of chance, is there a better and a worse? We yield to a stranger’s embrace or give ourselves to the waves; for the blink of an eyelid our vigilance relaxes; we are asleep; and when we awake, we have lost the direction of our lives” (Coetzee, 30). Susan’s plight reveals man’s ignorance of “whether this world has a meaning that transcends it” (Camus, viii). Radical uncertainty is among the causes of man’s homelessness in the universe.

Coetzee also emphasizes the world’s incomprehensibility and inscrutable nature when Foe explains to Susan that “we have all of us been called into the world from a different order by a conjurer unknown to us” (Coetzee, 135). These words suggest Kierkegaard’s view of man being thrown fortuitously into the world and Kafka’s view of man’s awkward inhabitation in a world devoid of meaning. Foe explains to Susan that our lives proceed with no design or logic but are like a “whimsical adventure” (Coetzee, 135) presented in stories that are produced from a fanciful idea that suddenly impresses a writer. Here Coetzee echoes Kafka’s view of the inexplicable nature of life and man’s futile attempt at interpreting it.

Coetzee explores causes behind man’s estrangement from the world other than its incomprehensible nature. The curse of exclusion is one of these causes. It is expressed in the fact that among the causes of Susan’s alienation on Crusoe’s island is that she is living in the uncanny world of men in which she is rejected and unwelcome. When Susan tells Friday, “When you see me at Mr Foe’s desk making marks with quill, think of each mark as an island” (Coetzee, 87), she reveals the writer’s plight of desolation before the empty piece of paper, which for him becomes an island since its emptiness makes him feel as if he has no home. The fact that Susan has to await Foe’s judgment of her work, just as Crusoe assessed Friday’s labors, makes Foe play the role of the reader who evaluates the work of the writer and keeps the eye of judgment on him. This is why he emerges as a foe or enemy of the writer himself. Thus, as in Kafka’s *The Trial*, where through Joseph K. we have the figure of the man who is continually exposed to judgment, here Coetzee presents through Susan the same figure and ordeal of the excluded individual suffering from a strict and severe society that judges and unfairly condemns.

The curse of exclusion is also clear in Foe's forced seclusion, which reveals man's plight of being an outsider and a confined member of society, since he is forced to remain indoors. For Foe's appearance anywhere would make him someone people would pursue, because he is followed everywhere by bailiffs and creditors. He has to live his life vicariously through Susan, since he is regarded by society as their enemy, as his name implies. He cannot be integrated or accepted as a friend in society and this explains why he tells Susan: "I am sadly enclosed. Be my spy. Come back and report to me how the world does" (Coetzee, 150). It is obvious here that the haunted Foe parallels the haunted and pursued Joseph K., who is obsessed with being watched in Kafka's *The Trial*.

On closer examination of the causes behind man's exclusion and disintegration within the world, it becomes obvious that difference is one of the reasons for this predicament. This is clear in Susan's dilemma. For Susan is not only alienated on Cruso's island, but is herself regarded as an alien, as the Other. Cruso warns her not to venture from his castle since "the apes would not be as wary of a woman as they were of him and Friday" (Coetzee, 15). This makes her wonder: "Was a woman to an ape, a different species from a man?" (Coetzee, 15). She is, therefore, made to feel that her womanhood makes her a strange being. Hence, it is not merely the island which makes her feel alienated, since she is not in her home or natural dwelling-place, but it is also her treatment as the Other which makes her feel that she is a stranger in the world of men, and even among nature and the world of animals.

Friday is another figure in whom the curse of exclusion is glaring. Friday's cut tongue and his mutilation make him emerge as the Other par excellence. His difference is what alienates and separates him from the world. Susan's rejection of Friday, her horror and the fact that she shrinks and "flinches away" (Coetzee, 32) in his presence, leads her to add: "An aversion came over me that we feel for all the mutilated...Because they put us in mind of what we would rather forget, how easily, at the stroke of a sword or a knife, wholeness and beauty are forever undone?" (Coetzee, 85). Her words symbolize the curse of exclusion to which the mutilated and the different are doomed. Susan's attitude also reveals that the world expresses "no real recognition of the Other – no real appreciation of *his* subjectivity" (Gallagher, 24).

Susan and Friday, however, do not merely suffer from exclusion individually. They are threatened with it together when they go to England. Susan and Friday exist

in England as the Other. They are “the only folk in England without lamp or candle. Surely this is an extraordinary existence we lead! For let me assure you, Friday, this is not how Englishmen live. They do not eat carrots morning, noon and night, and live indoors like moles, and go to sleep when the sun sets” (Coetzee, 83). Susan’s words reveal that she and Friday are not merely different from everybody else in England, but are regarded by everybody and made to feel their difference, which Susan, as a former dweller in England, is able to perceive clearly.

Coetzee also raises the issue of exclusion through the inability to write. He reveals that writing is a means by which man can be assimilated into the world. Just as having a cut tongue and being mute severs man from the world, a paralyzed hand and a dry pen can also lead to the same fearful doom. This is why Susan exists as a marginalized person. She longs for the magic pen that would make her draw and give birth to her story on the island, and thus become a real person. She tells Foe: “Do you know the story of the Muse, Mr Foe? The Muse is a woman, a goddess, who visits poets in the night and begets stories upon them. In the accounts they give afterwards, the poets say that she comes in the hour of their deepest despair and touches them with sacred fire, after which their pens, that have been dry, flow” (Coetzee, 126). She imagines writing as a way to validate her life in relation to Foe.

The plight of exclusion and non-assimilation points to another factor which heightens man’s sense of alienation and desolation. Before Susan’s encounter with Cruso, we see this aspect of the human condition in our first introduction to her. At the beginning of the novel, Susan tells us that she was “swimming against the current” (Coetzee, 5). This piece of information makes the reader see that Susan is one woman against the universe. She has to fight her way through it in order to survive. Hence, this is a world fraught with hardships and animosity. Man’s life in it is a tortuous struggle to combat its enmity and frowning face.

Susan also expresses her extreme frustration at the failure to communicate with Friday, which parallels man’s frustration at not being able to communicate with the world and, as a result, results in “a malaise, an absence, a failed dialectic” (Penner, xiv). She says: “All the elation of my discovery that through the medium of music I might at last converse with Friday was dashed, and bitterly I began to recognize that it might not be mere dullness that kept him shut up in himself, nor the accident of the loss of his tongue, nor even an incapacity to distinguish speech from babbling, but a disdain for intercourse with me” (Coetzee, 98). The world’s hostility to man is also

symbolized in Foe's attitude to Susan. Foe seeks to exclude Susan from the story of the island, since "the woman has no place in the political and religious story Foe constructs for the island; instead, her place is within the psychological drama of the mother-daughter relationship" (Gallagher, 178).

The ordeal Susan and Friday go through when soaked in the pouring rain as Susan tries to lead Friday home by taking him to Bristol highlights man's unsafe and unsheltered position in the world. Susan addresses Friday when they are wet from the rain: "From under the sodden robe came the smell I had smelled when the sailors brought him aboard ship: a smell of fear" (Coetzee, 102). The hostility of the world towards man is also evident in the fact that when Susan and Friday seek shelter from the rain in an inn and ask for bread and cheese, they are rejected by the inn-keeper and lodgers. The inn-keeper tells Susan: "This is a clean house, we do not serve strollers or gypsies" and turns his back on them, just as "a lout stuck out his foot, causing Friday to stumble, at which there was much guffawing" (Coetzee, 102).

Hostility is not the only characteristic of the world that leads to man's alienation and non-belonging. Impenetrability is another feature that instigates man's estrangement. When Crusoe tells Susan, "The heart of man is a dark forest" (Coetzee, 11), he voices the world's impenetrability, which man's dark heart suggests. Susan's attempt to penetrate Crusoe and Friday, and her failure, represent man's abortive attempts to penetrate the world and its mysteries. This idea is also emphasized in the fact that, after Susan's endless and futile attempts to try to extract from Friday the story of his cut tongue, she concludes: "But Friday's gaze remained vacant" (Coetzee, 68). Friday's vacant gaze reveals that the world has been divested of meaning. The endless conjectures she poses about Friday's story reveal that the world is a puzzle. We keep exploring things but can never reach the end or core where truth resides. Susan, therefore, concludes that "the world is more various than we ever give it credit for" (Coetzee, 69). In her inability to penetrate the world's various layers, Susan is like the man from the country in Kafka's parable, 'Before the Law,' always hovering on life's borders and forever barred from entry.

The world's impenetrability is also highlighted in the atmosphere of darkness and opacity in which man finds himself immersed. When Susan says, "All I lack is light. There is not a candle left in the house...we will grow used to living in gloom by day, in darkness by night" (Coetzee, 65), she emphasizes the darkness of the world and man's existence in it as a seeker of light and illumination. Thus, just as K. is

covered in an atmosphere of darkness, Susan is also surrounded with opacity. Like the court officials and the court rooms that are in dark and dirty attics, Foe is also an inhabitant of a room which is “not a room but a part of the attic to which you remove yourself for the sake of silence” (Coetzee, 49). It is also obvious, therefore, that, like Joseph K., Susan struggles with absence and concealment. She always fights a battle against them. Just as K’s judge is invisible and hidden, Susan’s author remains hidden for a long time. Unlike K., Susan finally manages to reach him. However, when she reaches him, it is not to her advantage because he turns out to be an enemy, not a friend.

Nevertheless, Coetzee, like Kafka, also reveals that there is yet hope of penetrating and arriving at an understanding of the world. Thus, beneath the apparent pessimistic view of darkness, an optimistic view of illumination is hidden. This optimistic view maintains that with patience one could arrive at an understanding of the world, just as the man from the country finally sees a radiant light emerging from behind the door of the law. Coetzee expresses this optimistic view when Susan claims that “we may infer that there is after all design in our lives, and if we wait long enough we are bound to see that design unfolding; just as, observing a carpet-maker, we may see at first glance only a tangle of threads, yet, if we are patient, flowers begin to emerge under our gaze, and prancing unicorns and turrets” (Coetzee, 103). Here Coetzee also emphasizes the importance of experience and struggle in enabling one to reach an understanding.

Coetzee explores a range of different causes behind man’s alienation from the world other than the ones already discussed. The lack of language is one of these causes, which is evident in Friday’s case. For Friday, life in England is “a terrible fall” (Coetzee, 56) from heaven and “from the freedom of the island where he could roam all day” (Coetzee, 65). He becomes imprisoned in a world of closure. Friday exists as an alienated person in England because he has only a limited knowledge of the language. Susan draws attention to the fact that ignorance of words and language can be a source of alienation from the world. She claims that Crusoe was mistaken for not teaching Friday words. Susan describes Friday’s life in England as a “fall” since on the island he was able to survive without using words, but in England his life becomes a punishment and a hateful task. Friday loses his health in England, while he was strong and robust on the island. He is a man out of his proper element, unable to survive his loss of language.

Susan's description of Friday's life in England as a "fall" suggests the theme of life as a punishment and exile from Paradise. Unlike Friday, whose expulsion is the result of his ignorance of language, Susan's is the result of the knowledge she gains on Cruso's island. This knowledge makes the whole world a strange place for her. She is physically and psychologically alienated from her former life of peace and composure. Knowledge emerges as a curse and a direct cause of man's alienated existence. This is why Susan says: "Sorely I regretted that Cruso had ever told me the story" (Coetzee, 24). By learning about Friday's cut tongue, Susan has eaten from the tree of knowledge and this leads her to banishment, exile and homelessness in the world. The island is, therefore, the place that brings about Susan's exile. It is also a metaphor of man's condition, since Susan as a stranded person on Cruso's island parallels man's existence as a wanderer doomed to loss in the world.

Furthermore, Susan's unanswerable questions which she asks about Cruso, Friday and Foe, and her failed quest for Foe, convince her that her whole life is an eternal process of loss and exile. Thus, the island embodies her very condition. Thus, she claims in one of her letters to Foe: "Sometimes I wake up not knowing where I am. The world is full of islands, said Cruso once. His words ring truer every day" (Coetzee, 71). Coetzee, like Kafka, expresses the view that the world is the place in which man can never find a dwelling place but remains a perpetual wanderer.

The curse of alienation through knowledge is also clear in that revelation of what is hidden (Friday's tongue and nakedness) is a direct cause behind Susan's estrangement and sense of abhorrence. She is appalled at having her "eyes opened to what was present to them" (Coetzee, 119) but which she could never see clearly. Her situation is reminiscent of Joseph K's feeling of dizziness and suffocation in the stifling atmosphere of the court offices. Like Joseph K., she has glimpsed a reality and partaken of a world that is beyond her comprehension and endurance. This explains why she sees her life on the island as a punishment. She says: "This island is our punishment, this island and one another's company, to the death" (Coetzee, 37). It is the place which gives her terrible knowledge through the discovery of a "hitherto unknown segment of existence" (Kundera, 5) and confirms her alienation and exile.

Anonymity is another means by which a person can become an exile and suffer from non-belonging. The dreary and servile life Susan and Friday lead in Cruso's home parallels man's equivalent position in the world. Susan implores Foe to

come to her and Friday and help them out of their condition, which is similar to that of a child who has been abandoned by its mother. Her anonymity makes her “trapped in a world of things and events without order or meaning” (Gallagher, 175). Anonymity is related to her homeless existence and threatens her with non-meaning.

Susan not only feels alienated on Cruso’s island, but her return to England is another experience of alienation. When she goes to England, she longs for Cruso’s island and desires to return to it. She is an embodiment of non-belonging, man’s ill-at-ease in the world and inability to accept any place as his dwelling place. Thus, “people have no feeling of being on the road anywhere, or of knowing where we are on the road to” (Penner, 11). She suffers from non-assimilation in a world in which she looks to the past, instead of confronting the present in terms of the future.

Susan expresses her longing for the lost paradise on Cruso’s island when she writes to Foe: “I will stifle if summer comes and I am still confined. I long for the ease of walking abroad in my shift, as I did on Cruso’s island” (Coetzee, 64). She expresses the view that life on earth is a form of imprisonment and confinement, but life in Paradise (which Cruso’s island now symbolizes) is one of freedom. This is clear through the metaphor of clothing. On the island, Susan could walk in her shift or undergarment, but in England she has to wear clothes. Having to wear clothes in general emerges as a symbol of confinement. Thus, the world is a place in which we are trapped and imprisoned. It is a place in which we feel ill-at-ease.

Man’s yearning for a lost paradise is also obvious through the example of Cruso. For Cruso, life away from the island is a state of exile and separation from his place of belonging. His island is his place of belonging, but his return to England is an experience of alienation, not a nostoi or homecoming. His homesickness is for his island on which he lived as the master of his destiny. This is why he tells Susan: “I ask you to remember, not every man who bears the mark of the castaway is a castaway at heart” (Coetzee, 33). For although he is actually a castaway stranded on a strange island, he feels that the island is his home and place of belonging. This emphasizes that “people can only be in love with one landscape in their lifetime. One can appreciate and enjoy many geographies, but there is only one that one feels in one’s bones” (Penner, 20).

Cruso’s words also highlight Susan’s habit of defining things according to established definitions. He draws her attention to the fact that one cannot always depend on civilized concepts of words to evaluate and assess any situation in life. One

of the major causes of Susan's alienation is her tendency to define and classify things without looking beyond them. Susan, therefore, does not understand Cruso, and says: "I reflected long on these words, but they remained dark to me" (Coetzee, 34). Susan's experience on Cruso's island is an experience of utter darkness and concealment. She lives among two men whom she does not know and cannot even come to know. Her use of words does not express her actual situation.

Cruso's longing for his home is also evident in the fact that, once he is carried on the merchantman to be taken back to England, he couldn't overcome his nostalgia. Susan says: "Now he was dying of woe, the extremest woe. With every passing day he was conveyed farther from the kingdom he pined for, to which he would never find his way again. He was a prisoner, and I, despite myself, his gaoler" (Coetzee, 43). Susan also comforts him by telling him: "We will take ship again for the Americas, and be driven from our course by a storm, and be cast up on your island" (Coetzee, 44). Her words reveal that Cruso's comfort and serenity is in remaining on his island.

Coetzee suggests that alienation from one's supposed place of belonging stems from man's adaptation to a new world. This is expressed in Susan's words that describe her feelings on Cruso's island after her residence on it: "When I lay down to sleep that night I seemed to feel the earth sway beneath me. I told myself it was a memory of the rocking of the ship coming back unbidden. But it was not so: it was the rocking of the island itself as it floated on the sea. I thought: It is a sign, a sign I am becoming an island-dweller" (Coetzee, 25). Susan's words highlight the extent of her alienation from her former world, her gradual withdrawal and loss of grip on a familiar life. She becomes an "island-dweller" so that her former existence as a city-dweller is engulfed by the new one. Her estrangement from her former existence is also clear in her union and coupling with Cruso. Cruso, the ironic symbol of the "New World," takes her into his world. Thus, Susan's former rejection and repulsion are replaced with closure. Thus, his new world feeds on and replaces her old world.

Coetzee also expresses alienation through stasis and rejection of change, as suggested in the figure of Cruso. "Which is easier: to learn to see in the dark, or to kill a whale and seethe it down for the sake of a candle?" (Coetzee, 27). This is what Cruso tells Susan when she asks him if there is no way of fashioning a lamp or a candle. Cruso is alienated from civilized life in Britain, but also estranged from life in general. He is an example of a man who exists but does not truly live, since he "would

brook no change on his island” (Coetzee, 27) and refuses to struggle. Crusoe’s static, Thanatos existence and his stubborn rejection of change condemn him to isolation.

However, alienation through rejection of change reveals man’s responsibility for his estranged state. Apart from the external factors that force this state on man, there are internal factors that contribute to alienation. Alienation through misconception is evident in the fact that Susan realizes that Crusoe’s island is different from her own conception of an island. Thus, here again, Susan experiences alienation in terms of a discrepancy between conception and reality. She acknowledges that travelers’ tales refer to the “desert isle” as a pleasant and inviting place. However, she also claims that “the island on which I was cast away was quite another place: a great rocky hill with a flat top rising sharply from the sea on all sides except one, dotted with drab bushes that never flowered and never shed their leaves...” (Coetzee, 7). Thus, the island Susan lands on is alien from her ideal conception of one. It is not an Edenic one but is a place of ugliness, harm and danger. Thus, Susan experiences acute alienation on the island, since it is different from the picture she has of it, and her experience is an encounter with uncanniness and strangeness.

Susan’s encounter with uncanniness and strangeness is evident in that she feels alienated and isolated among the company of brutes and birds on the island. She says: “But who, accustomed to the fullness of human speech, can be content with caws and chirps and screeches, and the barking of seals, and the moan of the wind?” (Coetzee, 8). Thus, by being snatched away from the world of words and thrown into the world of sounds, Susan feels that she has become a stranger and recluse. Moreover, Susan’s life in Foe’s mansion in England, which is more of a madhouse sheltering “a castaway and a dumb slave and now a madwoman” (Coetzee, 77) is another example of her encounter with strangeness.

Friday also experiences uncanniness in England. Susan claims that Friday’s experience in England and his rescue from the island is a curse rather than a blessing. She likens him to a watch-dog “raised with kindness but kept from birth behind a locked gate. When at last such a dog escapes, the gate having been left open, let us say, the world appears to it so vast, so strange, so full of troubling sights and smells, that it snarls at the first creature to approach...” (Coetzee, 80). Thus, Friday is an alien living in a strange world separated from his people.

Man’s encounter with uncanniness is not merely manifest in the strange and different place in which he finds himself. He encounters uncanniness through people

as well. Susan's situation is partly attributable to the fact that her view of the world is totally different from that of Cruso. This is evident in their discussion of the significance of law, which becomes an example of "a failed dialectic, two opposing points of view that are never resolved in a synthesis" (Penner, 27). Susan cannot imagine a world with no laws, whereas Cruso claims that he needs no laws on his island. Through Cruso's mentality and "inflexible refusal to indulge in progress" (Penner, 115), we come to see Susan as psychologically and socially unlike him.

Susan emphasizes Cruso's existence as the uncanny Other when she says that he "though an Englishman was as strange to me as a Laplander" (Coetzee, 30). Cruso's difference from Susan is suggested in the fact that the only piece of furniture he has on his island is a bed. This symbolizes his Thanatos existence, since he spends his entire life dormant and indifferent to the world. Susan, however, in her insistence that Cruso change his life and thus enter into the world of the living, emerges as Eros, or the voice of life, and represents the importance of struggle and change. Coetzee also symbolizes man's unstable existence in the world through Susan's discovery of the dead, bloody babe. Susan's inability to accept Cruso's mind or lifestyle makes her waver between Eros, or the symbol of life, and Thanatos, the symbol of death. In her inability to exist harmoniously with the strange Cruso, she leads a Thanatos existence like the dead babe that she describes: "I could not put from my thoughts the little sleeper who would never awake, the pinched eyes that would never see the sky, the curled fingers that would never open. Who was the child but I, in another life?" (Coetzee, 105).

It is also obvious that an enormous gap separates Susan and Cruso, not only because they are different from one another, but also because each one of them insists on his\her notions. Coetzee explains that man's insistence on clinging to certain concepts is what alienates him from people who behave differently from him. Coetzee also offers a solution that would enable man to escape from his alienated state which is to adopt a different code of behavior that would enable him to survive in a strange world among different people. This solution or advice is expressed by Susan when she begins to see in Friday something she could not see before. She says, "We cannot shrink in disgust from our neighbor's touch because his hands, that are clean now, were once dirty. We must cultivate, all of us, a certain ignorance, a certain blindness, or society will not be tolerable" (Coetzee, 106). Thus, man should develop an attitude based on acceptance and relinquish his stubborn resistance and dismissal of what is

different and unfamiliar. Susan refers to her previous insistence that Friday is a cannibal, whereas later on she realizes that she was mistaken.

Coetzee also contends that man's blindness is one of the causes behind his alienated and estranged state. Susan's blindness prevents her from seeing Friday's hidden side, which is apparent in his gestures, eyes and music, and which cannot be conveyed in words. Her failure to go beyond the apparent resembles K's inability to penetrate beneath the surface of court proceedings. Susan's alienation is not merely from the world, but also from nature. She cannot bear the sound of the wind, and she makes a cap with flaps to tie over her ears, and closes her ears with plugs. Her attitude of stopping her ears shows that she is unwilling to listen to what the world is saying to her. Thus, she has a double handicap of blindness and deafness.

In addition to exposing the different causes behind man's alienation, Coetzee presents man's isolation which hinders his ability to fit into the universe. Friday emerges as the perfect embodiment of man's isolation. Susan describes Friday as "gazing out into the setting sun, nodding to himself as though a voice spoke privately inside him that he was listening to" (Coetzee, 13). Thus, Friday emerges as the figure of the isolated man who cannot fit into the world or communicate. The voice that speaks privately to him makes him seem that he is only conversing with himself.

Isolation and loneliness are also expressed and verbalized by Susan. For although she and Friday live together in England, Susan never feels that she has a companion. For "Friday stood like a statue...But the unnatural years Friday had spent with Cruso had deadened his heart making him cold, incurious, like an animal wrapt entirely in itself" (Coetzee, 70). Thus, Friday emerges as an epitome of human isolation and acts as an embodiment and a reminder of an unbearable distance from the human world. Susan also says in her contemplation of Friday: "The desire for answering speech is like the desire for the embrace of, the embrace by, another being...How dismal a fate it would be to go through life unkissed!" (Coetzee, 80). Susan uses physical contact as the metaphor of communication between people, whereas being "unkissed" marks man's isolation through absence of communication. This is the curse that afflicts Friday from Susan's point of view. It is also the curse she, too, suffers from, since there is no one with whom she can converse and interact.

The single tune Friday plays also marks his utter withdrawal from the world and his indifference to others. His seclusion is also evident in the fact that he "persisted in the old tune, and the two tunes played together formed no pleasing

counterpoint but on the contrary jangled and jarred” (Coetzee, 97). He insists on playing his own tune and refuses to play the different tune that Susan plays and, therefore, insists on remaining enclosed within his own realm. Furthermore, we learn that his “eyes are always closed when he did his flute-playing and spinning” (Coetzee, 98). Thus, he refuses to see anyone around him, and insists on remaining sheltered in his own world.

Cruso is also an isolated being. For the fenced house termed his “castle” reveals his tendency to isolate himself. Cruso’s cloistered existence is also made clear when Susan tells him that he should keep a record of his life on the island. A record would serve as a “memorial to be left behind, so that the next voyagers to make landfall here, whoever they may be, may read and learn about us, and perhaps shed a tear” (Coetzee, 17). Cruso’s response indicates that he does not consider the past to be worth remembering in this way. Susan also tells Friday: “Does it not speak volumes that the first and only piece of furniture your master fashioned was a bed?” (Coetzee, 82). Here Susan highlights Cruso’s position as a man who turns his back on the world. The bed and his endless slumbers are the most glaring manifestations of his withdrawal from the world into bare existence.

Coetzee raises another problem behind man’s estrangement from the world and his feeling of being an outsider in it. This is the problem of the world’s silence. Friday emerges in *Foe* as the symbol of the world’s silence through his muteness and cut tongue, which makes him hold back his story from Susan. Friday’s silence is a symbol of the world’s silence. The world’s silence makes man lead an agonized and painful life, since the world cannot offer answers and explanations. This is why Coetzee reveals Friday as a major cause behind Susan’s restlessness and misery. Through his silence, he reminds her of her impotent existence and confirms her as an exile from the world. He stands before Susan, as the Sphinx stands before man as an eternal reminder of man’s ignorance and inability to unravel the Pharaohs’ secrets. Friday’s silence, however, not only emphasizes his strength, but also emphasizes his weakness, since the world’s power over man handicaps and mutilates him. Muteness as a symbol of man’s impotence is emphasized by Susan when she says, “By a dumb slave I was to understand a slave unmanned” (Coetzee, 119).

In attempting to pierce Friday’s silence, Susan asks endless questions about her existence and life in general. She finally concludes: “The questions echoed in my head without answer” (Coetzee, 30). Coetzee emphasizes the silence of the universe

and man's status as a questioning being who cannot be put to rest by being offered any responses. Thus, Susan is alienated because of her inability to solve life's riddles. Her alienation also stems from the silence with which she is threatened by Cruso and Friday. Thus, Susan, like Joseph K., is presented as continually seeking the oracle that would answer her questions about Friday and Cruso, their island and how Cruso managed to survive on it.

Nonetheless, Coetzee demonstrates that silence has both negative and positive features. In one of the most revealing passages in the novel, Susan gives profound expression to the maddening curse of silence and muteness which can make man's life on earth a terrible inferno of isolation and estrangement. She tells Friday: "Oh, Friday, how can I make you understand the cravings felt by those of us who live in a world of speech to have our questions answered! It is like our desire, when we kiss someone to feel the lips we kiss respond to us. Otherwise we would not be content to bestow our kisses on statues, the statues of kings and queens and gods and goddesses?" (Coetzee, 79). Thus, silence and muteness are the equivalent to death for Susan. And yet, as Susan reveals the curse of silence, she also reveals that it can be a blessing. When Susan tries to take Friday to Bristol to find him a return passage, she is asked questions about her companion. Here she points out the agony of being faced with endless questions that she has to answer. She believes at this point that the ability to speak is a curse and that silence is sometimes preferable: "How many more questions, how many more questions? What a boon to be stricken speechless too!" (Coetzee, 100). She feels at this point that Friday's muteness is a blessing, since he is spared the trouble of having to face the endless series of questions that people impose on him.

Everywhere Susan goes, she expects to have questions asked about her and Friday. This also highlights their position as outsiders who cannot be assimilated anywhere before they answer the questions the world asks about them. Susan understands the need for silence, in spite of this understanding: "There comes a time when we must give reckoning of ourselves to the world, and then forever after be content to hold our peace" (Coetzee, 124). Thus, even though man is denied an explanation from the world, he has to offer it a reckoning so as to achieve peace with himself.

Coetzee shares with Kafka important insights concerning the plight of the alienated writer and his position as an outsider in society. This is clear through the

example of Susan. Susan, the female castaway, represents the position of the writer as an outsider. The crew of her ship mutinied against the captain, killed him, and left her in the boat with the dead captain's body until she landed on Cruso's island. Thus, she is rejected and cast out of their world. Her plight parallels the plight of the writer who is cast out by society and forever seeks inclusion and acceptance. Susan's description of herself as "the woman washed ashore" (Coetzee, 99) means that she is excluded from the story of the island, which, in Foe's view, is the story of men. This is a story where women have no part. It parallels the position of the writer as the rejected and excluded Other. The view of the writer as the unacceptable Other is also evident in the fact that Susan is a woman who is never desired (in the sexual sense) by Friday or Cruso. Similarly, the writer suffers from the agony of being socially regarded as an unwanted stranger. Therefore, the world that refuses to shelter the writer becomes a strange and hostile one. The writer exists in it as a wanderer and a homeless exile.

Susan's position as an outsider is also evident in the fact that she cannot write her own story, but has to hire a man to do it instead. This parallels that of the writer in general. He is left like the man from the country 'before the law,' never being allowed entry. Similarly, Coetzee as an Afrikaner suffers from marginalization. Coetzee is also torn by "the sense of his dual identity: as a South African citizen, and as a Western writer living in South Africa" (Penner, xv), which creates the unbearable tension of non-belonging. Thus, Coetzee brings to the novel a feminist argument in defense of women, and through this feminist critique, he affirms the writer's unstable and insecure existence. In addition, Foe's attempt to withhold Susan's story on the island parallels the writer's dilemma of having his stories censored, since their place in newspapers appears with blank spaces. Coetzee as a writer suffered this humiliation personally, and in presenting it, he not only speaks of himself, but speaks also as "a writer writing for other writers" (Gallagher, 192). Furthermore, just as Susan feels alienated in her home, England, Coetzee as a South African, writing in English, the language of the colonizer, rather than Afrikaans, suffers from the same sense of alienation. His situation also parallels Kafka's ordeal of writing in German, rather than in Czech. The new world of the colonizer preys on the colonized by severing his ties with his mother-language. Friday's cut tongue emerges as a symbol of the colonizer's destruction of the native language and culture, and attempt to replace it with his own.

There is a difference, however, between Coetzee and Kafka. Kafka seems to be secluded in a world of his own and is detached from humanity, since *The Trial* uses the third person. Coetzee, on the other hand, through Susan Barton, employs the intimate voice of the narrator. Thus, he seems to be carrying out a conversation with the reader rather than with himself. A tone of intimacy can be discerned, for example, in Susan's description of Cruso: "I have told you how Cruso was dressed; now let me tell you of his habitation" (Coetzee, 9), Coetzee seems to be conversing with the reader and guiding him through Susan. This makes Coetzee more approachable than Kafka.

The position of the writer as an outsider is also manifest in Foe's situation. He is harassed and haunted by the bailiffs who seek to force him to pay his debts, and, as a result, he remains in hiding and is unreachable. The bailiffs represent the world's hostility towards the writer. They keep him 'before the law' of indictment, condescension and severe judgment, never allowing him to escape from "the state of siege" (Gallagher, 5). Like Joseph K., Foe is pursued everywhere, but unlike K. who goes to the authorities in search of them, Foe simply hides. It is also very revealing that Coetzee gives his writer the name of Foe. The name certainly implies that the writer is regarded as a foe or an enemy of society rather than as a friend. He is brushed away and despised, inhabits dirty and dark attics, and is treated as an obnoxious creature, just as Gregor Samsa, the beetle-man, inspires disgust in everyone around him and ends up being thrown in the dustbin.

Chapter Three

The Nut without a Kernel

Do you see the story? Do you see anything?

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 57

If we devote ourselves to finding holes exactly shaped to house such great words as *Freedom*, *Honor*, *Bliss*, I agree, we shall spend a lifetime slipping and sliding and searching, and all in vain. They are words without a home, wanderers like the planets, and that is an end of it.

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 149

Come with me...show me the way,
I'll make a mistake, there are so many ways here.

Franz Kafka, *The Trial*, 52

In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word, unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come to the heart of the story.

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 141

The Sphinx's riddle in *Oedipus Rex* conveys the idea of man's estrangement from his self and his smallness before the universe. It also suggests the idea of the hollowness, complexity and ambiguity inherent in words, which alienate man despite their function in clarifying and explaining things. For instead of allowing man to obtain simple understanding of things around him, words complicate things further, so that man finds himself struggling with ambiguities that obstruct his attempt to reach his destination, which is meaning and interpretation.

The fact that the Sphinx's riddle reveals that language and words are intricate and complex is evident in the fact that the people who attempt to solve it fail to comprehend the meaning of her words. This is because of the way the words are formulated. Even though there are no difficult words used, it is hard for anyone to tell what the Sphinx is referring to. Her riddle emerges as a symbol of the undecipherable text which no one can penetrate or interpret. The large number of Thebans who perish and meet their death because of their failure to read the Sphinx's text emerges as a symbol of the threat of death and castration that awaits the reader who fails to read and interpret a text.

Thus, words and language emerge as a challenge and a battle that man has to fight and conquer, not as a friendly means or tool of assisting him to communicate and comprehend things. Oedipus, who manages to solve the Sphinx's riddle, is, therefore, a symbol of the ability to conquer words and their complexity. He is also a symbol of the perceptive reader who can read between the lines and, in a way, rapes and conquers the text (the Sphinx is destroyed after Oedipus solves the riddle). The situation of the interpreter compares to that of the reader, who becomes the protagonist in a special situation.

In *The Trial*, Kafka reveals that he is not merely concerned with man's self and identity, but also with the problem of language, meaning, interpretation and the complex nature of a work of art. He is also concerned with the reader's position and standing before a work of art and through the depiction of Joseph K's plight, he seems to be depicting the reader's plight and experience with a literary text. In fact, *The Trial* emerges as a commentary on the literary text and the reader's response to it.

Through Joseph K's ordeal, Kafka presents the notion of the text as an investigation that raises and stimulates questions but offers no answers or solutions. Once K. is told that he is condemned, he finds himself part of the absurd and esoteric court and its strange law. The declaration of his accusation stimulates an endless

number of questions in K's mind. He struggles to find answers for them by resorting to the court and its officials, but his efforts are to no avail. Through Joseph K's futile attempts to find answers to his questions, Kafka unfolds the nature of his art. The reader ultimately learns that "there is no *answerable* question to be found anywhere in the works of Kafka. For it is in the nature of his questions that they allow of no answers. It is also true to say that Kafka's questions are not only unanswerable but also unquestionable. This is one of the secrets of his art: he wields the magic by which to remove the question mark from the questionable" (Heller, 20).

As K. plunges into the absurd situation in which he undertakes a long investigation to discover the nature of his offense, the reader finds himself part of the text and he becomes involved in K's situation as if it were his own. He, too, cannot let go of the events and almost becomes a character in the novel, not a detached reader who is merely observing the bizarre proceedings. The Kafkan text, is, therefore, a train that is "easy to board, hard to leave" (Kundera, 8). The questions asked by K. are the questions the reader would ask while reading the novel, but just as the court offers K. no answers but, instead, adds to his confusion, the author, too, offers his readers no answers. Thus, Kafka presents his work as an inquiry and "a long meditative interrogation" (Kundera, 31). The reader's experience with Kafka, therefore, is the experience of questioning and the only wisdom he gains from his encounter with the Kafkan text is "the wisdom of uncertainty" (Kundera, 7).

The fatal and threatening silence of the world, which is presented by the fact that K's questions are met with no answers, is symbolic of the silence of the text and its resistance to interpretation. The endless gaps that K. struggles to fill in order to make a full picture out of his fragmented life represent the elliptic nature of the text, which says certain things but leaves several other things unsaid. The reader, therefore, is cursed with incomplete knowledge. This is even more tantalizing than complete ignorance. He therefore finds himself like K., "thrown into a state of agitation" (Kafka, 10), since he becomes entangled in an atmosphere of concealment, rather than revelation and illumination. This atmosphere of concealment is highlighted by the fact that *The Trial*, which is "Joseph K's Inferno, deals with a victim of divine justice who does not know even the offense for which he is summoned, and whose judge remains to the end concealed behind an army of subordinate prosecutors and advocates with very questionable credentials" (Draper, 1941). This concealed and unreachable judge parallels the concealed meaning and signification the reader struggles to uncover.

The problem of the impenetrability of the law and K's failure to be initiated into its mysteries parallels the problem of the impenetrability of the text. Kafka highlights this problem in the parable, 'Before the Law,' in which the man from the country, who spends his entire life attempting to gain admittance into the door of the law, becomes an epitome of the reader who struggles to enter into the mysteries of the text. The parable also "points to the basic tragedy of man who has eaten from the Tree of Knowledge (there is a law) but cannot reach the Tree of Life (the meaning and purpose of this law): He stands before the door to the Law (which in the parable stands for the promise of life, of fulfillment, of the goal) prevented from entrance by the keeper of the door. (The entrance to the Garden is guarded by the cherubim 'to keep the way to the Tree of Life')" (Altmann, 55).

Hence, instead of being initiated into the text's mysteries, the reader realizes that the text is a door he cannot enter and that it is uninterpretable and unreadable. When the prison chaplain relates the parable to K., who insists that the door-keeper did not fulfill his duty and only deceived the man, the priest tells him: "You have insufficient respect for the written record and you are altering the narrative" (Kafka, 168). Here, Kafka is drawing attention to the sacred and holy nature of a work of art and the written word. The fact that Kafka's work resists interpretation seems to be his protective shield for his art, since a scriptable text and a text that one can rewrite by offering a different interpretation alters the original text and transforms it. By presenting a complex and undecipherable text like *The Trial*, Kafka seems to function as a door-keeper to his art.

The parable, 'Before the Law' also "does not tell or describe anything but itself as text...It reflects the unreadability of the text, the impossibility of acceding to its proper significance and its possibly inconsistent content, which it jealously keeps back. The text guards itself, maintains itself – like the law, speaking only of itself, that is to say, of its non-identity with itself. It neither arrives nor lets anyone arrive. It is the law, makes the law and leaves the reader before the law" (Derrida, 211).

The priest also tells K. when he tries to explain to him that the door-keeper did not deceive the man: "I am only telling you the opinions which exist. You must not pay too much attention to opinions. The written record is unalterable, and opinions are often only an expression of despair" (Kafka, 169). Thus, Kafka seems to be saying that the literary text is, like a religious book, unchangeable and sacrosanct, and endless interpretations offered by critics are "an expression of despair" since they

cannot conquer the written word and arrive at its essence and core. Instead, they can only give their opinions and personal interpretations but cannot reach the essence or the idea in the writer's mind that produced and gave birth to the text. His words also give expression to the "impossibility of interpretation" (Thorlby, 68) and the parable 'Before the Law,' which he relates to Joseph K., emerges as a "projection of the concept of impenetrability, of waiting 'before the law'" (Thorlby, 69). In fact, all of Kafka's works are "essays in the problem of interpretation" (Thorlby, 84).

This inability to reach the essence brings in the problem of the absence of a source or foundation on which one could depend for interpretation, since Kafka offers no clues or threads to guide his readers to interpret his text. The power of Kafka's works lies in their "undermining any clear representational system of reference that lies beyond the text itself. His stories refuse the referential grounding one needs in order to generate sense" (Thiher, 35). All of Kafka's texts are like the parable 'Before the Law,' which features endless door-keepers who stand guard to his work.

Kafka's *The Trial* dramatizes K's endless and abortive attempts to determine the nature of his offense and unravel the mystery of his absurd situation. He is caught up in the man from the country's correspondingly useless attempts to penetrate the door of the law, which comes to suggest the "infinite postponement of the signified" (Barthes, 59). This leads to an endless state of agitation and alienation. The absence of a definite signified within the text's kernel turns the reader's experience with it into a plunge into an abyss and an encounter with emptiness.

When the priest offers K. the different opinions about the door-keeper and presents a kind of literary analysis of the parable, he emerges as a critic. The different interpretations and analyses he communicates to K. allow the door-keeper to emerge as an epitome of the protean text, the plural nature of a text and the infinite interpretations of a work of art. The different interpretations offered by the prison chaplain also dramatize the fact that "the text is always paradoxical" (Barthes, 58) and that it harbors a "diversity of possible meanings" (Lodge, 270). For the prison chaplain at first implies in his argument that the door-keeper deceived the man from the country, then he argues that the door-keeper himself was deceived. Thus, by presenting an argument and its counter-argument, he emphasizes Barthes' view of the text as paradoxical and as something the reader can "play with" (Barthes, 63). Hence the reader becomes a writer, so that in the end we have an infinite number of texts and intertexts instead of a movement toward a single source.

This endless number of texts and intertexts, which make it impossible to pinpoint or identify the original text, suggests that the text becomes alienated from its origin as it is engulfed by the endless strings of texts that grow out of it as branches grow out of a tree's trunk. The reader, as he finds himself lost in a web of endless texts, is also estranged and driven away from the original home and source from which these sub-texts developed.

The door-keeper, who symbolizes the multiplicity of interpretations, is the threat that Kafka feared. Kafka brings in the parable, infiltrates it into the heart of the novel and shows that the man from the country never gains admittance into the law to stress that no one could gain admittance into the essence of his work. Instead, like K., the reader can only keep hovering around the borders of the Kafkan text, begging that all letters, words, phrases and sentences might allow him to be initiated into an interpretive cult, just as the man from the country begs the fleas in the door-keeper's collar to help him enter the door of the law. Thus, "seeking is of no avail and 'He who seeks will not find'" (Altmann, 57).

In addition, Kafka reveals through the plight of the man from the country that the reader's attempt to study a text with "a view of finding *one* interpretation will always be childish" (Alberes, 85). The man from the country focuses merely on the lowest door-keeper and forgets about the other door-keepers. He pettily and childishly keeps nagging him in order to enter. The text is designed to "provoke successively every possible interpretation" (Alberes, 85). Actually, "a privileged, definitive interpretation does not exist for the very simple reason that Kafka was not familiar with it and wrote these very texts only to show that it was not to be found" (Alberes, 85). His texts, therefore, do not dramatize concrete events and characters, but rather dramatize states, the major one of them being the reader's *mise en abyme*. Nihilism and nothingness are the only messages the reader can be sure of grasping in his works.

The parable, 'Before the Law' is, therefore, symbolic of the literary text and the reader's experience of alienation before it. Literature, like the law, "stands open" (Kafka, 166) to everyone but not anyone can penetrate or comprehend it. The other door-keepers, apart from the lowest door-keeper the man from the country encounters, symbolize the multiple layers of meaning the reader should try to interpret in order to conquer the text. Thus, the endless door-keepers represent the endless palimpsests of a text. They stand as embodiments of the "postponing of the joy of seeing" (Thorlby, 50). Like Christian in Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the reader has to fight the

monsters and dragons (layers of meaning and ambiguities) in order to reach salvation and heavenly grace (initiation and experience through understanding a work of art).

The door-keeper, who is wearing a fur-coat and has a “great pointed nose and a long straggly black Tartar beard” (Kafka, 166) represents the threat the reader faces in his struggle with a complex text and its intricate meanings and messages. The reader experiences a Thanatos state when he finds himself unable to interpret a literary text and realizes that the text is impenetrable and that he is inadmissible to its entrance.

The reader, nevertheless, despite being inadmissible, feels that he is entangled in the text, so that he can neither be part of it nor escape from it, just as the door-keeper forever guards the door of the law. Despite his extremely conscientious and loyal guard and vigilance over the door of the law, the door-keeper is never allowed like the man from the country to enter it. Like K., the reader feels alienated and desolated. He enters the literary work assuming that it is an easy and enjoyable experience, but then he realizes that there is trouble in store and that it is a terrible experience to be unable to understand what is going on. In fact, this is the constant concern of the reader when reading Kafka’s *The Trial*. Like K., who cannot fathom what is happening to him and why it is happening, the reader cannot understand the text. Thus, he finds himself in an unfamiliar world in which “his need of logic is never satisfied, his hope of identifying a goal is forever vanishing” (Alberes, 64).

Literature, therefore, becomes an uncanny world for the reader, who goes through a state of shock and loss as he reads the text. He approaches the world of literature, and as he gains admittance, he first assumes that he is welcome to it and that it is easily approachable, just as K. feels that he can trust the prison chaplain and speaks openly to him because of his apparent friendly demeanor, until the prison chaplain tells K.: “Don’t be deceived” (Kafka, 166). Thus, we should not take things at their face value but should read between the lines and develop our faculties of perception and insight. The reader in approaching literature is like the man from the country who approaches the law under the assumption that it is a door anyone can enter, since “the law is supposed to be accessible to everyone and at all times” (Kafka, 166), until he encounters obvious difficulties (the endless door-keepers).

Apart from symbolizing the multiple layers of meaning in a text, the endless door-keepers represent the labyrinthine text, the fact that “the text is a fabric” (Barthes, 60), since it is made up of endless signifiers in which one becomes lost and

separated from meaning. The reader is, therefore, challenged by the Kafkan text and feels, like K., that there is a plot against him once he enters it. For instead of being welcome and received with hospitality, he is expelled and driven away from it. He is denied the “pleasure of smoothing it out so that he has the meaning in the palm of his hand” (Benjamin, 118). But, like the man from the country, the reader refuses to go away and persists in trying to gain admittance into this difficult world. As a result, the reader is consumed by the text. He is wearied out and crippled by it as the man from the country’s “sight grows weak and does not know if it is really getting darker around him or if his eyes are deceiving him” (Kafka, 167). In fact, *The Trial* is “almost as exhausting an experience for the reader as the events described in it have been for its protagonist” (Osborne, 87).

The metaphor of the text as a labyrinth is also clear in the fact that, when the court usher suggests that K. should see the court offices, K. tells him: “Come with me...show me the way, I’ll make a mistake, there are so many ways here” (Kafka, 52). K. feels lost in the endless corridors and passageways leading to the court offices. The building he enters is like a labyrinth. K’s situation parallels the reader’s experience of alienation before the Kafkan text since he, like K., feels lost in an intricate and web-like labyrinth in which he feels imprisoned and caged. Arrival at meaning or sense in this labyrinthine text is what would enable the reader to feel reconciled with the work of art. However, the absence of meaning or logic makes him perpetually imprisoned and lost in the whirlpool of ambiguity and complexity. What is even worse is that even if one glimpses a certain meaning in Kafka’s work, it is “a meaning that eludes precise definition and may, indeed, assert a puzzle, not clarification” (Pascal, 19). Freedom and certainty seem unapproachable and, like K., the reader searches for a glimmer of light to show him the way out of the labyrinth. There is a continual search for “Ariadne’s thread” (Lodge, 272) that would lead to the exit door of illumination and understanding and, therefore, escape from the “Cretan labyrinth” (Lodge, 272) of the text.

The reader soon becomes, like K., a wanderer seeking a sense of direction in “the infinite variety of ways” (Politzer, 6) that characterize the labyrinth. The reader’s attempt to seek a road-map that would guide him along the way parallels the position of the man in Kafka’s parable, ‘Give it Up!’ In this parable, a man who is lost in a city asks a policeman to guide him, but instead of being an information-giver, the policeman answers the man’s question with another question. When the man asks him

the way, the policeman answers him saying: “You asking me the way?” (Kafka, 456). He therefore mocks the man for resorting to him since, apparently, he himself is ignorant of the right way. His advice to the man is to “Give it up! Give it up!” (Kafka, 456). “Give everything up! The policeman seems to be saying, let all hope go, abandon the way and the desire ever to find it, give up your quest, your drive and your yearning, your very existence – yourself !” (Politzer, 7). Thus, “the figure of the Information-Giver testifies to his awareness that information about order in this world was no longer obtainable” (Politzer, 7). This is the message he delivers once he is called upon. It also seems to be Kafka’s message to his readers, a message voicing the futility of their search for signposts that would lead to a destination beyond their unsheltered and homeless existence.

Furthermore, just as K. feels lost and perplexed as he enters the cathedral and tells the priest: “ I can’t find my own way in the darkness” (Kafka, 172), the reader also feels lost in Kafka’s labyrinth. He is confronted with “the lack of a way into the story” (Szanto, 42) and needs someone to guide him in this darkness and opacity. Unfortunately, however, “no didacticist, no interpreter is available” (Szanto, 44). K. enters the cathedral and is given a lamp by the priest to find his way, but he can never find his way on his own and always needs someone to lead him. Here, as in the parable, ‘Before the Law,’ one perceives Kafka’s recurrent theme of “the unsuccessful arrival or the failure to reach the goal” (Szanto, 18).

As K. leaves the cathedral, he tells the priest: “You were so kind to me, and now you dismiss me as if I meant nothing to you” (Kafka, 173). The fact that the priest explains things to K. and then dismisses him is symbolic of the reader’s plight before a work of art. For the writer offers the reader certain guidelines to follow as he approaches his work of art, but once he goes deep into the work of art, he is left to his own devices. Like K., he must find his way on his own. Thus, Kafka draws attention to the responsibility of the reader once he penetrates a work of art. He should “assume responsibility for the act of reading rather than seek to avoid it in the name of an institutionally approved method of interpretation” (Wolfreys, 15). He is, therefore, left alone, and the work of art becomes an island on which he is stranded and marooned.

This reveals that penetration into a work of art is a difficult task and a burdensome experience. In fact, Kafka offers this warning to his readers at the beginning of the novel when Joseph K. is warned by the warder Franz that “great demands will be made on you” (Kafka, 6). For the reader, once he penetrates the text,

will also find that great demands will be made on him, since he finds himself struggling before a complex and intricate tale. Thus, he encounters the text as a challenge and a great demand made on him. The reader, like K., should face this challenge by “keeping calm” (Kafka, 6) as Franz advises K. Calmness and composure are the protective shields offered by the warder for K. and the reader, since agitation and restlessness when encountering the absurd and surreal could lead to insanity. This is the advice that Kafka offers his readers at the beginning of his novel to prepare them and suggest that the world they are encountering in his art is a totally strange and unfamiliar one.

K. tries to avoid being taken further into the court rooms since “the further he went, the worse it would become” (Kafka, 54). He feels that his dizziness and inability to breathe would be over only if he left this place. His position is the same as the reader’s. For the further the reader penetrates the Kafkan text, the more he feels weak and alienated. Penetration and involvement only add to the reader’s confusion and loss, since he encounters more gaps and ambiguities, rather than revelations and answers. The reader, therefore, feels trapped and shackled inside the text and, just as the whole world seems to have plotted against K., the text seems to have plotted against the reader. Like K., the reader tries to withdraw from this situation by retreating into an uncanny and unbearable world.

In his attempt to portray the reader’s experience of alienation before a work of art and to give an actual picture of this experience before the text, Kafka has K. speak to the man he sees in the court offices: “I’m an official too, after all, and accustomed to the air in offices, but here conditions are just too awful” (Kafka, 54). The reader is accustomed to difficult plots in literature, but with Kafka, the plots and events are “just too awful” and unbearable, since he becomes lost in a weird and unfamiliar text.

Another cause for the reader’s alienation brought about by his encounter with the Kafkan text is that “his only recourse to any previously known rationality is to interpret the phenomena he experiences in terms he can understand; and there he makes his mistake” (Szanto, 44). He realizes that the system or the alphabet he depends on to unfold and decipher mysteries within a work of art cannot be used and is inapplicable to this text and its mysteries. It emerges as the wrong code and the wrong tool to equip him, just as K. enters the cathedral “carrying a picture book, an album for sightseers tucked under his arm instead of a prayer book” (Politzer, 175). This foreshadows his ultimate failure to grasp the message of the prison chaplain,

since the wrong book he carries symbolizes his wrong approach. Kafka, therefore, locks the reader out of his castle, just as the man from the country is locked out of the door of the law. The reader also feels alienated because he is oriented to interpreting a work of art, not knowing that he can only experience but not interpret Kafka.

The reader's estrangement from the work of art is also highlighted in the obscurity of the parable, 'Before the Law,' and all the Kafkan parables in general. The reader approaches a parable with the notion that "the essence, the *raison d'être* of the parable is precisely a clear, defined moral inference or injunction; and in Kafka's parables, this essence is absent" (Pascal, 145). "The reader's expectation of a simple moral lesson that will illuminate the meaning of the events related is cheated, for there is no formulated moral and the conclusion of the incident is obscure and ambiguous, leaving the reader baffled and distressed" (Pascal, 145). The Kafkan parable, therefore, "does not illuminate the mind but terrifies and confuses" (Pascal, 147). Like Joseph K., the reader never reaches his destination, and "his hopes are never confirmed; he is cheated as the 'man from the country' is cheated. But in every case the author does not triumph over the reader's failure; in his parable he embodies his own grief and despair" (Pascal, 152).

Kafka also reveals the reader's position and relation to a work of art in the episode of K's visit to the cathedral when the priest or the prison chaplain tells K.: "The court asks nothing of you. It receives you when you come and it releases you when you go" (Kafka, 173). Similarly, the reader is received by a work of art when he approaches it and is released when he decides to leave it. But his feeling of being imprisoned stems from his encounter with great things and great ideas in a work of art. The work of art makes the reader, like the Russian in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, "see things – things" (Conrad, 194), but he can only see them without comprehending them. Thus, he feels entangled and estranged from his familiar world. On the other hand, like Conrad's Marlow, the reader partakes of a knowledge that others do not have, and even though he cannot interpret this knowledge or communicate it to others, he feels different from others. This knowledge alienates the reader from his fellow humans, just as Marlow's experience in Africa has changed him into a different person who cannot fit into his former home.

Thus, the knowledge gained from literature has the effect of alienating man from his fellow men. It also alienates him from his home, which becomes a strange place for him, while the whole world becomes an island on which he is stranded.

After his experience with the literary text is over and he comes to the end of the journey, the reader ends in disillusionment and, like Marlow at the end of *Heart of Darkness*, concludes that “we live, as we dream – alone...” (Conrad, 57). He realizes that he is totally isolated and secluded, since he cannot communicate his experience to others, who seem to be totally different and have nothing in common with him. All the ties that could have existed between him and humankind seem to have been broken and destroyed.

The text’s complexity and the difficult task of understanding the message and meaning, if any, conveyed by it, emerges as the major problem the reader faces and which alienates him from the literary work itself. By encountering the text, the reader becomes an alien to this world, so that he does not merely partake of man’s experience of alienation presented by the writer, but, becomes the epitome and externalization of this experience. Kafka reveals that there is another threat that the reader encounters as he approaches a work of art. This is the problem of the intricacy and hollowness of words and language.

When K. visits the court rooms, he not only feels estranged from the world through the sickly and corrupt atmosphere of the court offices, but also is estranged from language, words and meaning. When the girl and the information officer talk to him, he does not understand what they are saying; he could hear only “the noise which filled everything” (Kafka, 57). Here, Kafka voices the “absent essence” of language as “fallen logos” that “has no power to confer being” (Thiher, 36). Thus, Kafka’s novel not only dramatizes the fall of man but also the “fall of language” (Thiher, 59) and its failure to perform its function.

Thus, language is a place in which all meaning is blocked and drowned. Words become mere utterances floating in the air but with no sense to give them shape or solidity. Here, Kafka poses the problem of “what words mean and the dreadful possibility that they have no ultimately reliable meaning at all” (Thorlby, 2). He also gives a “precise symbol for the mysterious, insubstantial nature of language: resting on who knows what real foundation” (Thorlby, 50). K., therefore, feels as if the court officials are speaking a language different from his own. Similarly, the reader feels that Kafka is speaking a language different from his, a language which no one but the writer can understand.

Hence, Kafka “clogs the reader’s path” (Pascal, 12) with his cipher. There seems to be no common code between the writer and the reader. Instead, as in the

parable, 'Give it Up!' there seems to be a misunderstanding between Kafka and the reader, just as there is a misunderstanding between the man and the policeman which emerges as a "painfully lingering reminiscence of *Paradise Lost*" (Politzer, 13). This absence of a common code or a common thread of interaction is not strange since Kafka, the most alienated of individuals who gave expression to this alienation in his works, shared no common code with the world or himself. His life was a fragmented puzzle that he struggled to complete, but his failure to do so only left his readers with an insecure basis for gaining a full picture of what he tried to communicate, if ever he meant to communicate anything at all. In fact, a Kafkan narrative is "a combination of events that lead nowhere. Whereas a story ordinarily opens up new perspectives and the possibility of new adventures, the Kafkan narrative closes these perspectives. It functions like the Torture Machine described in 'In the Penal Colony,' engraving in the flesh a sentence which the condemned man is unable to read" (Alberes, 55).

The fragmentary style of Kafka's writing makes the reader feel alienated and estranged from the world of art. The reader feels tantalized because Kafka, like the court officials, gives his readers incomplete and ambiguous information. The reader emerges from his reading experience totally bewildered and confused. Instead of encountering situations, events and characters, the reader encounters an endless number of absences, omissions, enigmas and anonymities, so that the only certainty he possesses is that of hollowness and blankness. His encounter with the Kafkan text, therefore, becomes an encounter with a "dark void" (Alberes, 2) that he cannot communicate or comprehend.

The problem of language is particularly clear in *The Trial*. Kafka reveals that language is an important means of communication and that the inability to use and understand language instills a sense of desolation and alienation. In fact, language plays an important part in K's struggle. From an Italian dictionary, K. writes out the words he might need for his tour of the cathedral with the Italian businessman. Thus, finding the proper words is an important step in facilitating communication between men. As K. tries to eliminate barriers to communication by leafing through the Italian dictionary, the reader also attempts to find a common code through which he can overcome distances between him and Kafka.

K's search for the proper use of words by this means inadequately expresses man's endless struggle with the intricate web of language. The endless hierarchical structure of the court to which K. is summoned and which is "beyond the

comprehension even of the initiated” (Kafka, 93) parallels not only the endless layers of meaning within a text but also the endless signifiers in language. Titorelli, the painter, explains to K. that the case of the accused never comes to a standstill. The endless cycles and circles of accusation K. goes through represent man’s endless loss in the labyrinth and whirlpool of language. Like the text, language emerges as a trap and an ambush laid for man and the reader. It becomes a tool of bondage and enslavement rather than liberation and mastery. In fact, *The Trial* gives a vivid picture of the horror and feelings of insecurity that surface as “language fails to fasten on anything real” (Thorlby, 25).

However, it is not only the intricacy of the text and language that alienates the reader from the work of art, since Kafka shows that the alienation of the reader can be related to certain limitations of his own experience. Through Joseph K., Kafka reveals that alienation is often the result of literal-mindedness on the part of the reader. When the supervisor tells K.: “You pay such close attention to every word I say” (Kafka, 12), he reveals that K. is a literal-minded person. He focuses on the actual words said to him but fails to comprehend what these words might mean. When the supervisor tells K.: “I suppose you’ll want to go to the bank now?” (Kafka, 11), K. assumes that this is where he should go, when actually the supervisor was merely guessing or offering a recommendation. Thus, K. is alienated from words and meaning. He takes the surface meaning of things and never tries to understand the hidden meaning behind words. He stands as a symbol and a representative of the literal-minded reader who fails to grasp the meaning and message of a text.

The prison chaplain also screams at K. saying: “Can’t you see two inches in front of you?” (Kafka, 165). This statement draws attention to K’s literal-mindedness and blindness, which prevent him from seeing things clearly and arriving at an understanding. K’s literal-mindedness is also highlighted when K. tells the advocate’s nurse, Leni, that the examining magistrate, whose picture he sees in the advocate’s office, is sitting in a judge’s chair. In response, Leni tells him: “that’s just make-believe...actually he’s sitting on a kitchen chair with an old horse-blanket thrown over it” (Kafka, 85). Here, Leni’s words are very revealing since they shed light on K’s failing and flaw, which is blindness to see beyond the surface of things. Leni, however, is more perceptive and can see the multiple and hidden facets that K. cannot see. Here, Kafka seems to be contrasting through K. and Leni two opposite kinds of readers, the literal and one-track-minded one, whom K. represents, and the reader

who has the ability to read between the lines and see what is hidden and embedded within the text by analyzing it with sharp perception and insight, whom Leni represents.

The problem of the literal-minded reader also emerges in the parable, 'Before the Law,' in that the man from the country "sits for days and years" (Kafka, 166) on a stool given to him by the door-keeper to *one* side of the door of the law. This symbolizes the attitude of a static and narrow-minded reader who insists on seeing only one aspect to a work of art, but fails to see aspects latent in it, since he limits himself to only one sphere of vision just as the man "sits to *one* side of the door" (Kafka, 166). This also helps explain why the man fails in his endless attempts and entreaties to be permitted to enter.

His attempts fail because he, like the man in the parable, 'Give it Up!,' seeks a univocal meaning in the text. The door-keeper's prevention of letting him enter the door, is, therefore, the punishment for adopting such an approach. It parallels the policeman's advice to the man to give up his search for a way. The advice, or rather, the indictment: "Give it up! Give it up!" (Kafka, 456), and the door that is shut by the door-keeper at the end of the parable, 'Before the Law,' symbolize the text's closure and its refusal to cooperate with the one-track-minded reader. Thus, Kafka reveals that "whoever intends to extract an unequivocal meaning from his works will, like the man in 'Give it Up!' hear a question instead of an answer. The policeman's "give it up!" is also spoken to all those interpreters of Kafka who seem to assume that he believed in the existence of only one way leading in one direction to one aim" (Politzer, 8).

The literal and one-track-minded approach to literature is also represented by the fact that the man from the country in the parable, 'Before the Law,' "keeps watch on the door-keeper almost without a pause and...forgets the other door-keepers, and this door-keeper seems to him the only obstacle to his entry into the law" (Kafka, 167). Thus, he blinds himself to the reality evident before him and neglects the various strings and chains of meaning that, if perceived and acknowledged, would free him from confusion.

Kafka, however, does not merely present the problem of literal-mindedness and the reader's failure to grasp the meaning and message of a work of art, but he also presents a solution as to how to overcome this problem. This is clear in the fact that the man from the country, in spite of his weak sight, "does manage to distinguish in

the dark a radiance which breaks out imperishably from the door to the law” (Kafka, 167). This is symbolic of the fact that, despite the threats and complexities of a work of art, there is yet hope of being allowed to gain admittance. Gaining admittance can be allowed if the reader changes his approach to a work of art and becomes alert and receptive to the different voices and meanings that the work of art communicates. He should have an “enduring spirit” like Odysseus so that he can hear the sweet music of literature.

Kafka presents another solution to which the prison chaplain gives expression. Joseph K’s interpretation of the parable related to him by the prison chaplain is that the door-keeper deceived the man from the country. The door-keeper tells the man: “Nobody else could gain admittance here, this entrance was meant only for you. I shall now go and close it” (Kafka, 167). This is his response to the man’s question, “How is it that in all these years nobody except myself has asked for admittance?” (Kafka, 167). The prison chaplain’s words in this context, which compare to his remark on K’s false reading of the judicial world: “You are deceiving yourself about the court” (Kafka, 166), serve as a commentary and a guide on how the reader should respond to a literary work. The chaplain also tells K.: “Don’t be too hasty...don’t take somebody else’s opinion without testing it” (Kafka, 167). The reader should also not be taken in by everything said or written by the writer, but should try to examine the work closely in order to arrive at its core of meaning.

Through Joseph K’s doom at the end of the novel, Kafka also seems to be warning the reader, who would adopt an attitude similar to that of the protagonist. For K. is symbolic of the reader who continually needs to be spoon-fed and guided, but has no power to depend on himself. Even in his death, he cannot assume responsibility for his own life. K. dies “like a dog” (Kafka, 78) and he leaves the world as he enters it. His death is symbolic of the doom of the reader who fails to respond to the deeper meanings of the work of art.

As Kafka’s *The Trial* expounds its author’s concern with the problem of language, meaning, interpretation, the complex nature of a work of art and the reader’s position before it, Coetzee’s *Foe* exposes and explores these issues. Among the issues that Coetzee discusses is the notion of the text as an investigation that raises and stimulates questions but offers no answers. This issue is presented through Susan Barton’s ordeal which makes her the parallel to Joseph K., Kafka’s protagonist. Like

Joseph K., Susan is an investigator continually asking questions to which she cannot find answers. The unanswerable questions that she asks about Friday and Cruso are not merely presented as questions any reader would ask about both characters. They also emphasize Coetzee's notion of the text as an investigation, which he shares with Kafka. The text is, therefore, a puzzle and a riddle that no one can solve.

The questions that Susan asks are the questions the reader would ask. When Cruso dies and Susan tells Friday that his master is dead, she wonders: "Did he know the meaning of death?...Did he know we were subject to death, like the beasts? I held out a hand but he would not take it. So I knew he knew something; though what he knew I did not know" (Coetzee, 45). The reader, like Susan, asks the same questions about Friday, and for him, as for Susan, he remains an enigma. The conjectures Susan makes about Friday's action of throwing white petals in the sea as a kind of "offering to the god of the waves" or "some other such superstitious observance" (Coetzee, 31) reveal the difficult task of the reader in interpreting a text that leads to no conclusions or certainties.

The tantalizing silence of the world, which is presented in the fact that Susan's questions are met with no answers, symbolizes the silence of the text and its closure on itself. Thus, Coetzee's work, like Kafka's, is characterized by "the absence of solutions to the problems portrayed" (Penner, 22). Susan tells Foe: "The story of Friday's tongue is a story unable to be told, or unable to be told by me" (Coetzee, 118). The fact that Friday's story is a story "unable to be told" parallels the inevitable silence within the novel and the text that leaves certain things unsaid and concealed. If the writer tries to give voice to what is silent within the novel, then it is, as Kafka claims in *The Trial*, merely an expression of despair at his confrontation with this silence. Susan also describes Friday's story as "properly not a story but a puzzle or hole in the narrative, I picture it as a buttonhole, carefully cross-stitched around, but empty, waiting for the button" (Coetzee, 121). Here she shows that Friday, the central enigma of the novel, represents absence and "the quality of emptiness or malaise" (Penner, 24), the absence of a middle to the story and the text's resistance to interpretation.

Coetzee also comments on the inherent silence within the text and any story through Foe's words to Susan. He reveals that it is the novel's nature to leave certain things unsaid. Foe tells Susan: "In every story there is a silence, some sight concealed, some word unspoken, I believe. Till we have spoken the unspoken we have not come

to the heart of the story” (Coetzee, 141). The text’s stubborn and adamant silence before the reader is also expressed by Susan when she tells Foe: “All my efforts to bring Friday to speech or to bring speech to Friday, have failed...He utters himself only in music and dancing, which are to speech as cries and shouts are to words” (Coetzee, 142).

Susan’s inability to combat and give voice to Friday’s silence highlights the problem of the text’s impenetrability. The text “is always cryptic; that is, it is a secret” (Derrida, 205). By preventing Susan from exploring the island, since this increases the likelihood for his “realm’s being invaded” (Coetzee, 25), Cruso, like the court officials and the door-keeper in the parable, ‘Before the Law,’ stands as a door-keeper and an obstacle to prevent Susan from penetrating the island. She reminds us of the reader’s difficulty in penetrating an obscure work. She is doomed to remain, like the man from the country, ‘before the law,’ never gaining admittance.

Another example of the text’s impenetrability is given by Susan when she tells Foe that “Friday is Friday” (Coetzee, 122) and that one can never “touch his essence” (Coetzee, 122). Here Susan communicates a truth about the message inherent in the text which Friday embodies. Just as Friday’s essence cannot be reached, the text’s essence and the writer’s message cannot be approached. We can only know that there is a message - that Friday exists, which is, unfortunately, the only knowledge we possess.

In his attempt to surmise why the slavers cut out Friday’s tongue, Cruso tells Susan: “How will we ever know the truth?” (Coetzee, 23). Here he shows that the reader’s attempt to excavate into the text to reach the core and kernel of meaning is futile. There is a “lack of transcendental order which endows everything with meaning; the significance of every object is its resistance to significance” (Penner, 24). The meaning will always remain unknown and concealed, and we will never be able to crack the nut to reach the kernel. We will always emerge defeated from our battle with the text, which will remain powerful and unconquerable.

Susan also reveals that man is forever surrounded with complexity and incomprehensibility. When she tries to use pictures to communicate with Friday, she says: “If there was indeed a slave-trader with a hooked knife, was my picture of him at all like the Moor Friday remembered?” (Coetzee, 69). Meaning can never be reached in essence. Only a picture or an image of it can be perceived, if ever it reveals

its face. Susan's struggle to communicate with Friday and interact with him parallels the reader's struggle to interact with a text that refuses to yield its secrets.

The various stories Cruso tells Susan about himself symbolize the multiplicity of meanings inherent in a text and the fact that a text cannot be read in a single way. Thus, the text is "dialogical, allowing a variety of voices to speak" (Gallagher, 46), not monophonic or single-voiced. There is also "no correct interpretation" (Lodge, 267) for a text. Susan's inability to identify Cruso's real story reveals the absence of a dependable source on which the reader could rely for interpretation. It also becomes clear that the text as "a ceaseless play of anomalous meanings, is 'indeterminable,' 'undecipherable,' 'unreadable,'" (Lodge, 271). As a result, Susan becomes trapped within the web of Cruso's endless stories. The fact that Cruso tells Susan different reasons as to why the slavers cut out Friday's tongue makes Friday emerge, like the door-keeper in Kafka's parable 'Before the Law,' as the embodiment of the protean text that elicits multiple interpretations and endless layers of meaning.

Coetzee's novel is a "mélange" (Penner, 113) and a multi-layered work of art which includes stories within stories and texts within texts. Its eclectic nature makes it an actual embodiment of the protean text and of intertextuality itself. The extensive, inclusive style, and the many tones of voice presented, turn the text into a tapestry in which multiple threads of different colors are interwoven. The text in this sense is particularly evident in the concluding chapter of the novel. An imaginary stranger enters Foe's house and finds Susan's supposed daughter asleep with "her face wrapped in a gray woolen scarf. I begin to unwrap it, but the scarf is endless" (Coetzee, 153). The endless scarf symbolizes the endless layers of meaning in a text. The scarf which is "endless" also symbolizes the endless ambiguities within a text which make it impossible for the reader to "unwrap" and "unfold" the text's meaning. It remains concealed as the girl's face remains concealed before the man who can never discover her identity.

Like the endless scarf that conceals an identity, *Foe* is a rewriting and revisitation of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. It starts where Defoe's novel ends, thus showing that "each work is an answer to preceding ones" (Kundera, 18). Through this intertext, we as readers are alienated from the familiar world of *Robinson Crusoe*. We see in *Foe* the 'unheimlich' face of *Robinson Crusoe*, and we realize that the story we thought we knew as readers contains within it hidden and treacherous depths. This is why we experience loss and alienation in our encounter

with *Foe*. We feel, like Susan, that we have been removed from our familiar surroundings and have been thrown into and marooned on a totally unfamiliar and strange milieu.

The reader realizes that the world of art is not an easy world, but one full of danger and horror. His encounter with *Foe*, the unfamiliar and fearsome face of *Robinson Crusoe* is, therefore, an encounter with the experience of alienation and estrangement. All the notions and concepts he could have acquired with *Robinson Crusoe* are now shattered. The reader is also estranged from his previous notion of the autonomy of a work of art, since he is made to see that a work of art is dependent upon and brought to life by preceding works of art. He is made to see that “any text is a new tissue of past citations” (Hawthorn, 179).

Moreover, the title, *Foe*, is very expressive, since this novel is really a foe to *Robinson Crusoe*. It shatters and consumes *Robinson Crusoe* and its world in bringing about a totally new one. This novel is also a foe to the reader, since it pulls him away from the world of hope, faith, promise, speech and life presented in *Robinson Crusoe* and throws him into the world of despair, doubt, silence and death. In addition, through Foe’s distortion of Susan’s story on the island, Coetzee reveals that a writer who uses a text to produce an intertext serves to annihilate its former self and essence. He therefore becomes the author of its destruction and becomes a foe to it.

Foe tells Susan: “The island is not a story in itself...We can bring it to life only by setting it within a larger story” (Coetzee, 117). Coetzee, like Foe, takes the story of the island as the skeleton or thread upon which he weaves the tapestry of his novel. By pointing this out, the writer draws the reader’s attention to the presence of different stories within the novel and that, although it is one book, it encapsulates other books within it. Furthermore, the writer demystifies and undermines the reader’s initial assumption, as he enters the world of *Foe*, that this is merely the story of an island. The reader eventually comes to feel as if he is walking on water, as if the novel he is reading is an island and the different stories it embodies are parts of an unsolvable puzzle.

Friday is an embodiment of intertextuality. His true self, which is engulfed by the alien selves created for him, is a symbol of the text’s alienation from its origin through the intrusion of alien texts. In fact, *Foe* is a metaphor and an epitome of intertextuality and the eradication of the original text by the birth of a foreign text that is totally alien to it. *Foe*, the rewritten and revisited version of *Robinson Crusoe*, bears

no resemblance to it whatsoever. It is its foil, its paradoxical and uncanny double. Thus, the writer who revisits a text is an “explorer-destroyer” (Penner, 26) who produces something entirely dissimilar to the original text.

Apart from revealing the text’s alienation from itself through the intrusion of its double, Susan gives expression to the dilemma of the fatherless and orphaned text that exists on its own. She writes to Foe: “I may bemoan the tedium of life in your house, but there is never a lack of things to write of. It is as though animalcules of words lie dissolved in your ink-well, ready to be dipped up and flow from the pen and take form on the paper” (Coetzee, 93). Thus, the text lacks an origin. It flows on its own and is born without being begotten. Its freedom from the author’s parentage is also a cause of the reader’s alienation, since he has no author to consult and is abandoned to his own devices.

As Kafka presents the reader’s plight before a work of art, Coetzee also reveals his concern with this problem as well as the text’s intricacy, multiple meaning and impenetrability. The reader, like Susan, feels estranged and undergoes a state of shock in reading, since Cruso’s island is totally alien to his conception and picture of a desert isle. The reader’s experience of alienation is heightened even further by foreign words used in the novel, such as “*Agua*,” “*Fala inglez?*,” “*Masa*,” “*pomonhas*,” “*quimados*,” etc. Like Susan, who struggles to understand Friday, the reader finds a number of words in the text that he struggles to decode and interpret in order to feel reconciled to the work of art. These foreign words, like the ambiguous messages and nuances within a text, emerge as door-keepers and obstacles that hinder the reader’s entry.

Susan’s existence as a stranded person on an island parallels the figure of the reader as a wanderer lost in the text, seeking to return to his Ithaca of safety and certainty. In addition, as Susan keeps asking Friday questions, and painfully sighs: “How I wish you would answer!” (Coetzee, 82), the reader experiences the same frustration in his struggle to find answers to questions about the work of art he encounters. The reader, like Susan and the man from the country, implores every word and phrase written by the writer to shed light and make things clear for him.

The fact that Susan sees herself as a beast carrying the burden of Friday and the story of the island parallels the situation of the reader as he is faced with the text in his attempt to unravel its mysteries. The fact that Susan sometimes longs to be “borne away to a new life in a far-off city where I will never hear your name or

Cruso's again" (Coetzee, 63) parallels Joseph K's refusal of further penetration into the court and the reader's similar position as he longs to escape from the task of interpretation.

Susan displays a meticulous care for detail, truth and accuracy as she insists on not having "lies told" (Coetzee, 40) about her story and her attempt to draw pictures to help Friday identify the slave-traders who abused him. She reveals in this way the writer's concern with truth and accuracy as well as the situation of the reader. The reader puts into question the validity of the author's presentation of art, just as he attempts to grasp the true message of the artist. Thus, the reader takes up a burden of interpretation in reading any text.

The problem of interpretation is also suggested in the parallel between Friday and the writer. Friday seems to be the possessor of ultimate knowledge in offering the world signs that it has to interpret. He is like the writer who presents events and situations and leaves the reader to discover the message behind them. Thus, the reader is insecure and restless unless he arrives at the core of the writer's meaning. This metaphor is clear in Foe's words to Susan: "Friday rows his log of wood across the dark pupil – or the dead socket – of an eye staring up at him from the floor of the sea. He rows across it and is safe. To us he leaves the task of descending into that eye" (Coetzee, 141). Here Coetzee reveals that the text is a burden as he draws attention to the importance of the reader's struggle to interpret it.

When Foe uses the pronoun "we" and "us," he emphasizes that it is not only the reader who is cast away in his encounter with an intricate text, but also the writer who exists as a castaway in his encounter with puzzling characters. Foe's words to Susan reveal that as the text emerges as a labyrinth for the reader, it is also an impasse for the writer. Foe tells Susan: "In a life of writing books, I have often, believe me, been lost in the maze of doubting. The trick I have learned is to plant a sign or marker in the ground where I stand, so that in my future wanderings I shall have something to return to, and not get worse lost than I am" (Coetzee, 136). However, Foe also acknowledges that, in the long run, this marker only indicates the degree to which he has been lost.

Another problem that the reader struggles with and which serves to estrange him from the literary work is the hollowness of words and language. There are several instances in which the novel betrays the hollowness of words, language, meaning and definition. The fact that Friday understands what is meant by "Firewood" and goes to

fetch it, but does not stir when asked to get “wood,” reveals that words are mere utterances with no intrinsic signification or essence. Here Coetzee, the linguist, explores the nature of words and language. He reveals their hollowness and failure to denote absolute meaning. Thus, his novel, like Kafka’s *The Trial*, dramatizes not only the fall of man but also the fall of language and its impotence. Susan’s abortive attempts to teach Friday the names of things is also Coetzee’s commentary on the hollowness of words and their lack of inherent meaning.

“He does not know what freedom is. Freedom is a word, less than a word, a noise, one of the multitude of noises I make when I open my mouth” (Coetzee, 100). Through these words that Susan addresses to Foe with reference to Friday, Coetzee again stresses the hollowness of words and their lack of grounding in reality. Susan also makes a point about words and their lack of a definition on her way to Bristol to take Friday back to Africa. She comments on “the lack of semantic closure in language” (Hawthorn, 10). For she stops in Marlborough and meets a stationer who calls Susan and Friday ‘gypsies.’ At this point, Susan again emphasizes the hollowness and abstract aspect of words. She says: “What is a gipsy? What is a highwayman? Words seem to have new meanings here in the west country. Am I become a gipsy unknown to myself?” (Coetzee, 109). Here Susan not only betrays the hollowness of words, but also suggest that their protean, unstable nature makes it impossible for us to reach a clear definition and meaning.

Foe also tells Susan with reference to Friday: “The words you have written and hung around his neck say he is set free; but who, looking at Friday, will believe them?” (Coetzee, 150). He emphasizes in this way that words do not have an inherent meaning. Friday is not free in spite of being labeled as free. Thus, the word does not always define or explain the true reality. It has no home, as Susan claims. This is further emphasized in the fact that the only letter Friday composes, as Susan tries to teach him writing, is the letter “O.” Friday’s “O,” “which is also a zero” (Penner, 123) is his means of mocking logocentric, civilized man, since his “O” points to the hollowness and meaninglessness of words. Thus, language as a means of paving man’s way towards an arrival at understanding and emergence from darkness turns out to be a terrible illusion. For “language fails to signify, to mean at all” (Penner, 27). The solid ground of faith in language falls apart to confirm the reader’s homelessness before the work of art.

When Susan asks Crusoe how many words Friday knows, he tells her “as many as he needs” (Coetzee, 21). She then tells him “you speak as if language were one of the banes of life, like money or the pox” (Coetzee, 22). Of course, the logocentric Susan says this ironically. However, when Susan tries to teach Friday words and writing, she draws the thing and then writes the word. She draws a house, for example, writes “h-o-u-s,” and then she wipes the slate and asks Friday to reproduce the written word. But then she wonders “whether they were truly the four letters, and stood truly for the word house, and the picture I had drawn, and the thing itself” (Coetzee, 146). Thus, language is an arbitrary system that does not easily sustain a direct correspondence between the word and the thing referred to.

In addition to exploring the complexity of language, Coetzee also reveals its double-sided aspect. This is clear when Susan describes Friday’s mouth as “too dark” (Coetzee, 22). It is too dark because he has no tongue. Thus, a man with no language lives in darkness, separated from his fellows through lack of communication. Language emerges as a tool of oppression, which explains why Crusoe teaches Friday only the words he thinks are necessary for him to learn. Furthermore, as language emerges as a tool of control, Susan also realizes that Friday’s lack of words makes him “his own master” (Coetzee, 150), whereas she and Foe, who “cavil over words in a dispute we know to be endless” (Coetzee, 150), are enslaved by it.

Coetzee, like Kafka, reveals that among the causes of the reader’s alienation before a work of art is the blockage that exists between writer and reader. This is evident in the fact that Susan is always suspicious as to whether her letters reach Foe. She says: “To whom am I writing? I blot the pages and toss them out of the window. Let who will read them” (Coetzee, 64). Thus, like Kafka, Coetzee reveals that writer (Susan) and reader (Foe, for he plays the double role of writer-reader) can never meet. Furthermore, the writer’s message, which Susan’s letters symbolize, never reaches the reader. The failure of communication between writer and reader leads to a compelling conclusion: “Literature is the ruin of all reference, the cemetery of communication” (Eagleton, 126).

“I am trying to bring it home to you, who have never, for all I know, spoken a word in your life, and certainly never will, what is it to speak into a void, day after day, without answer” (Coetzee, 80). Here Susan emerges as a symbol of the writer whose message is never received. The writer becomes a castaway separated from the reader, while the reader becomes a castaway separated from text and writer.

Furthermore, Susan explains to Friday that she is using similitude to express a certain idea that compares to what the writer presents to the reader in the work of art. Unfortunately, communication between writer and reader is by no means transparent. Susan expresses the difficulty of communication in terms of music: “We cannot forever play the same tune and be content. I could not restrain myself from varying the tune” (Coetzee, 97).

Susan asks herself as she tries to teach Friday the names of things and how to write them: “Somewhere in the deepest recesses of those black pupils was there a spark of mockery? I could not see it. But if it were there, would it not be an African spark, dark to my English eye?” (Coetzee, 146). Here Susan reveals that Friday highlights her ignorance and weakness. By drawing attention to the difference between the African and the English code, Susan further clarifies Coetzee’s portrayal of the complex system of signs, codes and the difficulty of communication, since “no sign or chain of signs can have a determinate meaning” (Lodge, 269). Friday poses a threat to Susan because he mocks her logocentricity and the unreliable frame of reference on which she depends to decode the mysteries of Friday (who symbolizes the mysteries of the text). Friday, therefore, mocks civilized man’s insistence on words as the only means of communication. Susan foolishly concludes to Foe that “Friday will not learn...If there is a portal to his faculties, it is closed, or I cannot find it” (Coetzee, 147).

The death of Susan and Foe together with Friday’s survival at the end of the novel symbolize not only the defeat and fall of logocentricity but also the defeat of the reader and the triumph of the text. Friday’s survival reveals that silence survives but speech and language are silenced and overthrown. “The faraway roar,...the roar of waves in a seashell” (Coetzee, 154) that the stranger hears as he puts his ear to Friday’s mouth also symbolizes the rise of the silent and foreshadows their rebellion. Friday in his silence and cut tongue represents the natives who are silenced in South Africa and the roar emerging from his mouth represents their violent rising up against their oppressors. Friday’s survival suggests that the silent slaves will rise and defeat the garrulous and articulate masters, whereas Foe and Susan symbolically die of frustration at not being able to uncover his secret and answer his riddle.

The reader’s defeat before the text is also evident in the imaginary speaker who enters Foe’s mansion and reads the beginning of Susan’s account of her story on Cruso’s island. He reads: “Dear Mr. Foe, At last I could row no further” (Coetzee,

155). These are the opening words of the novel and they are very fitting in this later context. They implicitly represent the reader's state, since the stranger, like the reader, is here confronted with a number of riddles and signs that he cannot decipher as he finds the dead Susan and Foe and the faint-breathing Friday with "a scar like a necklace, left by a rope or chain" (Coetzee, 155) about his neck. He realizes that he cannot penetrate this world anymore than K. can penetrate the court rooms or the man from the country can penetrate the door of the law.

The stranger and the reader, unconsciously reiterate internally Susan's words, "I could row no further," as they are met by a surge of ambiguities, complexities and riddles in the text. These words, with which Coetzee begins and ends his novel, reveal the craftiness of the author, who in this way conveys the message that the reader's journey is the same at the end as at the beginning. The journey is a vicious circle, and the reader arrives at the place where he started. Thus, the reader concludes that the text is "'unreadable,' if by 'readable' one means open to a single, definitive, univocal interpretation" (Lodge, 285). Instead of ending the journey with a sense of having learned from experience, he ends it with no increase in wisdom or knowledge.

"But this is not a place of words. Each syllable, as it comes out, is caught and filled with water and diffused. This is a place where bodies are their own signs. It is the home of Friday" (Coetzee, 137). This is the conclusion that the stranger or the imaginary speaker arrives at as he is immersed in the world of the novel. It is a world whose meaning is embedded within it just as Friday's secret is buried within him. It is a world which, like Kafka's world, has a logic of its own which no one can pierce. Therefore, the reader's attempt to crack the nut of Coetzee's and Kafka's texts makes him discover that the novel's kernel is empty. The novel always preserves and safeguards the true kernel which no one can reach or know.

Furthermore, the stranger's attempt to "pass a fingernail across his (Friday's) teeth, trying to find a way" (Coetzee, 157) parallels the reader's attempt to find a way that would lead him through the novel. Coetzee, like Kafka, reveals that the text is the real hero of the story. It remains unconquered and unconquerable, whereas the reader is destroyed and mutilated by it. It emerges as the untouchable. Furthermore, "its spirit is the spirit of complexity and it says to the reader: 'Things are not as simple as you think'" (Kundera, 18). Thus, Coetzee, like Kafka, shows that literature is a world of danger and hardship.

On the other hand, in addition to exposing literature's inherent complexity and ambiguity, Coetzee, like Kafka, reveals the reader's responsibility for his alienated state through the attitude and approach he assumes towards a work of art. This is clear through Cruso, a narrow-minded person who deliberately blinds his eyes and numbs his senses. He eats only one kind of vegetable and is preoccupied with the single activity that "arises straight from the annals of the Absurd" (Penner, 115) of building terraces. When Susan asks him why in all those years he has never attempted to build a boat and escape, he tells her: "And where should I escape to?" (Coetzee, 13). Cruso represents the single-minded reader who fails to see things clearly. In fact, Susan says that his life on the island had "narrowed his horizon – when the horizon all around us was so vast and so majestic! – that he had come to be persuaded he knew all there was to know about the world" (Coetzee, 13).

Susan, in contrast, is logocentric, and for her Friday is a text she cannot read. This is why she finds him "in all matters a dull fellow" (Coetzee, 22). She adopts a single-minded approach to interpretation. Susan's conception of language is what separates and draws her away from perceiving the essence of Friday. She is a representative of the unperceptive, unseeing reader whose stubborn attitude prevents him from interpreting the text. She stops her ears from hearing Friday's story that is buried within him as she prevents herself from hearing the maddening sound of the wind. Her attitude of stopping her ears reveals that "To the last we will have learned nothing. In all of us, deep down, there seems to be something granite and unteachable" (Penner, 26). She perceives Friday as a man who is alienated from language and believes that her mission is to bring him back to the "world of words...to educate him out of darkness and silence" (Coetzee, 60).

Coetzee not only presents the language of characters but also explores the different means of communication through which the reader could comprehend and feel things other than language and verbal communication. When Susan notices that Friday has a spear at his side, she concludes: "I have come to the wrong island...I have come to an island of cannibals" (Coetzee, 6). Susan also says later on concerning Friday: "This casting of petals was the first sign I had that a spirit or soul – call it what you will – stirred beneath that dull and unpleasing exterior" (Coetzee, 32). In this revealing passage, Coetzee shows the importance of signs as a means of denoting meaning. For even though there is an absence of verbal communication between Friday and Susan, she perceives from his actions a number of signs which denote

something. Moreover, the fact that Susan begins to change her attitude towards Friday upon interpreting his actions suggests that the reader should take advantage of whatever threads, clues or signs that provide the text with meaning. Thus, like Kafka, Coetzee reveals the importance of the reader's approach to the work of art in determining its meaning, and he, too, highlights the responsibility of the reader towards it.

In addition to the language of signs, Coetzee reveals the importance of tones in denoting a certain feeling. Susan says: "I knew of course that Friday did not understand the words. But it had been my belief from early on that Friday understood tones, that he could hear kindness in a human voice when kindness was sincerely meant" (Coetzee, 41). Susan also says with reference to Friday: "Are the eyes not rightly called the mirrors of the soul?" (Coetzee, 68). Although Friday cannot speak, his eyes are his means of communication and conveying messages. Pictures are also means of communication. Susan draws pictures in her attempt to help Friday reconstruct the story of how his tongue was cut out, but she realizes that pictures are confusing, since they can denote several meanings. She also realizes that signs and gestures have different meanings for different people. She says: "And how did he understand my gesture of putting out my tongue at him? What if, among the cannibals of Africa, putting out the tongue has the same meaning as offering the lips among us?" (Coetzee, 69). This multiplicity of meaning in actions, gestures and signs is what makes Susan emphasize and insist on the importance of words and speech.

Susan, however, discovers that the only language Friday can speak is the language of music. However, she realizes that even music is a complicated language in itself. This is why she fails to communicate with Friday when she tries to use his language by playing the flute. She realizes that the tune she plays is totally different from the one Friday plays. She claims that "there was a subtle discord all the time, though we seemed to be playing the same notes" (Coetzee, 96) when she tries to teach him to play her tune. Friday's adamant refusal to play Susan's tune confirms the impossibility of communication between them. Thus, Coetzee explores the different languages, including music, that exist to promote communication. Susan says: "Is conversation not simply a species of music in which first the one takes up the refrain and then the other? Does it matter what the refrain of our conversation is any more than it matters what tune it is we play?" (Coetzee, 96).

Even though Coetzee reveals the reader's failure through Susan and other characters, like Kafka, beneath this dark and pessimistic picture, he offers solutions: "The earth under our feet is firm in Britain as it never was on Cruso's island" (Coetzee, 26). Through Susan's words, Coetzee seems to be saying that Britain represents closure whereas Cruso's island represents openness. Cruso's island also represents and embodies the spirit of doubt and "the wisdom of uncertainty" (Kundera, 7), which is the essential spirit of the novel. This is the spirit with which the reader should approach a work of art in order to experience the text fully.

Susan is an adamant person. She refuses to see any credible and dependable means of communication other than words. For her, the greatest bane and curse is to be ignorant of words and language. She speaks to Foe concerning Friday: "How can he write if he cannot speak? Letters are the mirror of words. Even when we seem to write in silence, our writing is the manifestation of a speech spoken within ourselves to ourselves" (Coetzee, 142). Thus, Coetzee reveals the importance of words and language in communication, but also highlights Susan's annoyingly stubborn insistence on words alone as a means of communication. Coetzee also highlights the importance of other means of communication such as signs, symbols, music, dancing, etc. This explains why Foe corrects Susan's misconception of words and writing by offering us another point of view: "Writing is not doomed to be the shadow of speech. Be attentive to yourself as you write and you will mark there are times when the words form themselves on the paper *de novo*, as the Romans used to say, out of the deepest of inner silences" (Coetzee, 143).

Foe further tries to enlighten and reform Susan's thinking by telling her that "speech is but a means through which the word may be uttered, it is not the word itself" (Coetzee, 143). In addition, Coetzee offers an optimistic picture of communication by showing that there is always a means that a man can use in communication no matter how mutilated or handicapped he is. Foe tells Susan: "Friday has no speech, but he has fingers and those fingers shall be his means. Even if he had no fingers, even if the slavers had lopped them all off, he can hold a stick of charcoal between his toes, or between his teeth, like beggars on the Strand" (Coetzee, 143). Susan's refusal to accept or be convinced by Foe's enlightening words, however, make her a perfect example of a literal-minded, unperceptive reader. Her attempt to teach Friday words fails just as the writer's attempt to teach her to be a receptive and insightful reader fails. Thus, like K., she dies in the end. Her death, like

K's, represents the mental death of the limited reader. Thus, in her long quest for the kernel of meaning, she reaches no home, but hollowness and exile instead.

Conclusion

“Castaway,” I said with my thick dry tongue. “I am cast away. I am all alone.” And I held out my sore hands.

J.M. Coetzee, *Foe*, 5

This study has consistently maintained that Kafka and Coetzee emphasize the complex and puzzling nature of self, world and language, in relation to man's estrangement and alienation. In their exposition of the intricacy of self, world and language, Kafka and Coetzee express their concern with man's ontology and identity, the nature of the cosmos he inhabits and the means by which he lives his life and attempts to comprehend it. By representing self, world and language as challenges and threats that man faces but fails to conquer, both writers express a profound concern with man's helpless and pitiful existence. They reveal that man is essentially a questioning being who spends his entire life seeking answers and explanations. They also emphasize that life is a quest and an arena of riddles. The world emerges as “a ravaged one in which the impossibility of knowledge is established, in which everlasting nothingness seems the only reality” (Camus, 29).

Thus, man is an explorer forever embarking on a quest that he hopes would lead him to exit the world of enigmas and to enter the world of clarity. However, this quest is a failed one, since man is crippled by the intricacy of self, world and language. This quest emerges as a means of perpetuating man's loss, since it adds to his perplexity in giving him unbearable knowledge. Instead of showing him the way back home, the quest and the journey perpetuate his separation from his Ithaka and confirm his eternal exile.

The unapproachable, unperceivable Ithaka makes man a castaway on the unfamiliar islands of self, world and language. At first, he approaches these islands under the assumption that they are familiar realms that he merely needs to investigate to fully understand. However, as he delves into them, he realizes that they are dark and alien places he has never approached before and cannot penetrate. This dilemma

of non-belonging and non-assimilation which results from the inability to return from the boundaries of obscurity is portrayed in Joseph K. and Susan Barton, two characters who embody the plight of the human condition.

Kafka and Coetzee also reveal that there are other kinds of castaways, namely, writer and reader. They both emphasize that the writer suffers from non-inclusion in society, and his rejected position in it creates within him the feeling of being an ostracized being inhabiting a world in which he does not belong. They show that the writer feels alienated as he confronts language, since he finds himself at a loss as to what meaning he wants to convey and use, if ever he knows what message he wants to express. Thus, as man suffers from loss through uncertainty and confusion, the writer also passes through this turmoil. For “assertions can only be tentative, the writer can only see through a glass darkly” (Gallagher, 214). Thus, we witness the death of the omniscient, God-like writer.

The reader is also a castaway before the text, which is full of puzzles and intricacies. The art of Kafka and Coetzee “consists in forcing the reader to re-read” (Camus, 112). It encapsulates and harbors several meanings, thus making it almost impossible for the reader to hold on to a single meaning as definitive. The reader’s initial expectation of arriving at a topos or nostoi within the text is shattered, and he remains marooned on the text, forever separated from his Ithaka. As a result, alienation not only emerges as an experience that Kafka and Coetzee present in their works, but it is also an experience of the reader, too. However, despite this dark picture and sorry state, Kafka and Coetzee give voice to a cry of hope as they present certain options that might lead to escape from the terrible state of exile. Their solution is to adopt a receptive and open-eyed attitude towards self, world, language and text. For they emphasize that blindness is a flaw and a universal limitation.

Furthermore, on closer examination, it becomes clear that homelessness has negative and positive meanings. The absence of a home means desolation, eternal loss and exile. However, it has another aspect, since it denotes that man is alive through his multiple experiences and struggles in his attempt to reach a home. Similarly, a text has multiple meanings and embodies varied experiences. The presence of a home for the reader implies closure, which in itself signifies Thanatos or death, since it restricts openness and variety. However, it also spares the reader from the predicament of loss and bewilderment through plurality and multiple voices. Nevertheless, since

awareness of the doubleness of things leads to confusion and perplexity, alienation is a vicious circle that no one can escape.

Although Kafka is essentially an existentialist and Coetzee could be described as a post-colonial writer, neither writer actually belongs to a single tradition. For Kafka is a writer who is hard to classify in terms of a well-defined literary tradition. Coetzee also has repeatedly expressed his adamant refusal to be labeled as a post-colonial writer, or as belonging to a particular tradition. In addition, like Kafka, Coetzee's "fictional mode is difficult to label" (Gallagher, 45). Thus, both Kafka and Coetzee embody solitariness and non-belonging. This is why they give a clear and vivid presentation of the state of alienation. They essentially do not present events, situations and flesh and blood characters, but rather, mental states and human possibilities.

Kafka claimed that he understood the fall of man better than anyone else. His novel dramatizes man's fall and his life on earth as an endless trial through which he strives to prove that he is worthy of returning to his original home, paradise, and to end his exile and punishment of living on earth. What further suggests that Kafka presents the fall of man is that his world is "in truth an indescribable universe in which man allows himself the tormenting luxury of fishing in a bathtub, knowing that nothing will come out of it" (Camus, 116). Thus, man descends from the paradise of certainty and clarity and falls into the abyss of nothingness and hollowness on earth. Coetzee also dramatizes man's fall and reveals that earth is a foe to man as it surrounds him with intricate webs and overwhelms him with hostility. Like Kafka, who implicitly expresses the fall of language, Coetzee explicitly voices the cry which results from insights into its unreliability and betrayal.

Thus, Kafka and Coetzee reveal that man lives on earth as a fish out of water, forever feeling ill-at-ease and awkward about his world. Earth for man is a journey, a transit, and in his limbo-like residence on the island that earth is, man longs for the ship that would take him back to his home, namely, paradise. Kafka and Coetzee, therefore, present a truth and a reality about the human condition, not merely about character, writer and reader. Man lives on earth alienated and estranged because he is severed from his origin or original dwelling-place.

On earth there is no home or Ithaka because there is always confusion and perplexity, since earth, like a text, is the receptacle of several truths and several concepts. This plurality leads to eternal homelessness. Life on earth "offers

everything and confirms nothing...everything is given and nothing is explained” (Camus, 124). In paradise, however, truth resides and there is no confusion, since heaven is synonymous with perfection. Thus, man’s experience on earth is a shocking one which his birth foreshadows and summarizes. As an infant leaves its mother’s womb and screams from the shock of the world symbolized by the cold, noises and confinement outside, man spends his life on earth encountering many terrible experiences and yearns to return to a womb of safety, peace, quiet and warmth. He yearns for the womb of repose in which there are no challenges, rivalries and painful tasks. For in life “there is no resignation involved: always an endless signing-on to new tasks” (Camus, xv). In this long journey of yearning for his lost paradise, man, like Susan Barton, sighs: “Castaway...I am cast away. I am all alone” (Coetzee, 5).

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